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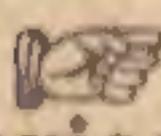
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TOM HAWK, THE TRAILER;

OR,

THE FOREST TRAGEDY.

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BY LEWIS JAY SWIFT.

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TOM HAWK, THE TRAILER:

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CHAPTER I.

A NIGHT'S WORK.

IT had been a fearful night in the forest and at the clearing. A series of heavy showers had prevailed, inundating the region, more or less, for miles around. The lightning made sad havoc among stately pines and sycamores, whose crashing, as they fell, rent from top to base, mingled but feebly with the almost incessant thunder-peals. Every forest-stream and gorge, filled to their utmost capacity, went roaring and surging downward, undermining banks that had remained firm for years, and hurling onward every thing encountered in their fierce progress. A night long remembered, not only for the wild and thrilling aspects it presented, but for the fearful tragedy which succeeding daylight revealed.

The storm-fury was then spent. Not, however, till the sun was fully two hours above the eastern horizon, did it overtop the sullen, retreating rain-clouds, and send its cheering rays over cleared fields and into forest-depths. There, upon a slight rocky eminence, stood a young man, looking around on the many tokens of the storm's fury. Just behind him, a shelf of rock protruded over a kind of indentation or cavity, which had evidently afforded him a shelter through the night of storm. Behind this, a huge chestnut had attracted a lightning-bolt, and its shattered trunk now lay athwart the mouth of the narrow cave from which he had just emerged. As he gazed upon it, an involuntary shudder passed over him, induced, no doubt, by a remembrance of the shock he must have experienced from his proximity to the fiery bolt.

"Enough to make one realize his own insignificance and

weakness," he soliloquized, half aloud. "But this won't do. The sun more than an hour high, and miles between me and the settlement which I should have reached last night. There's little danger of the reds being abroad in such a night as this has been. I shall be in time yet, to rouse the settlers to all needful preparation. I may be mistaken as to the designs of the Indians I saw, but it won't do to give the rascals the benefit of a doubt. One trophy, at least," he added, as his eye fell upon a panther-skin rolled up just within the aperture. "It's a wonder I awoke as I did, with that for a pillow."

Tightening his belt, he examined his rifle, saw that it was in good condition, and then stooped to take up the panther-skin. As he did so, "crack!" came a rifle report, and a bullet sung over him, piercing the upright splinter of the stricken chestnut still remaining. Quick as thought, he dodged aside, where the trees afforded a better cover, and glanced back. A sudden simultaneous discharge from two muskets, followed by a flight of arrows and exciting savage yells, told him that no time was to be lost. Springing around the rocky eminence, so as to place it between him and the Indians, he darted away for his life. On came the yelling pack in swift pursuit, not forty yards behind him. They partially halted when they reached the fallen tree, probably thinking that the white could not have escaped. A moment gained is every thing to one so closely pursued. The young man did not pause to note either the number or proximity of his pursuers, but directed his course through the densest portions of the forest. If the Indians, unable to see him on account of the intervening eminence, expected to find him disabled or killed, his bounds in the distance speedily undeceived them, and with renewed yells they again rushed like hounds upon the track.

Mile after mile was passed over, but as yet the hunter held his distance, luckily escaping the occasional shots fired at him. Once or twice he was on the point of stopping to return a shot; but as often restrained, knowing that it might enable his pursuers to spread out upon either flank and thus obtain a fatal advantage. He felt that he was within two or three miles of the settlement, and the thought gave him hope. But suppose the Indians should sweep on to its attack? They were hardly in sufficient numbers to risk the thing, he thought.

But if otherwise, would the settlers be prepared to meet them before they should murder or carry off some of the luckless inhabitants?

These were among the thoughts of the pursued man, while he was straining every nerve. Suddenly he felt the ground sinking away beneath his feet, and he fell nearly prostrate into a place where the water had made a treacherous underground channel!

"Ah! Well, *some* of the bloodthirsty crew 'll come to their death!" he said, as he partly rose and leveled his rifle.

The foremost savage was in plain view, and all of them, witnessing the white's mishap, were rushing on with exulting yells. He fired, dropping the leader, over whose body one or two stumbled in their wild rush toward their victim at bay. He felt for his hunting-knife, which, to his chagrin, he had lost during his flight. But he usually carried a pocket-knife, with a long, keen blade, which might do some execution among the pack which in a moment longer would be upon him. A quick search in his pockets told him *that*, too, was gone!

"Then here's to the death!" he gasped, as he seized his empty rifle, ready to battle to the last. But even as he spoke, a half-dozen trusty rifles belched forth behind him, and he saw the foremost of the oncoming savages go down like grass before the mower's scythe. This unexpected volley arrested the rest, who at once betook themselves to cover. Then began one of those backwoods fights so characteristic of the times, in which bodily agility and quickness of sight often turned the scale against superior numbers. Realizing that help was near, the young man commenced rapidly reloading his rifle. He had time now, for though some of the Indians were yet within a few yards of him, all their strategy was required to screen their bodies while returning the shots of their white foes.

The pursued man was literally between two fires, though screened from immediate danger by crouching down into the cavity where he had fallen. But he was not one to remain idle, and soon the reports of his rifle began to mingle with those of his friends. The soil had been washed away from two large tree-roots, leaving a space through which he could fire upon every foe that exposed any part of his person for a

moment. Ten minutes thus passed, when a cross-fire was begun on either flank, before which four or five savages fell at once, upon the damp forest-leaves. Then he knew that his friends were equal in numbers to the red-men, and had taken the initiative in forest strategy. A single shrill whoop, heard above the noise of conflict, was a signal quickly obeyed by the worsted Indians.

Getting as near together as possible, they let fly a volley of bullets and arrows; a dozen of the strongest bounded forward and dragged their slain and wounded companions behind their battle-line, and before their enemies could prevent them, the whole posse had disappeared in the bushes that extended far toward the left.

Short, quick and decisive had been that forest-battle. Our young friend, breathing hard, sprung from his place of retreat, just as a bevy of well-known forms burst from cover and poured a volley after the retreating savages. He was about to utter a shout of gratulation, when an object caught his eye that made his frame shiver. It was the body of a man hanging partly over the brink of the adjacent creek, his hands convulsively clasping some stunted bushes which, already loosened by his weight, were crumbling slowly downward. The poor fellow had been piercèd through by an arrow, and had thus fallen in his death-agony. Nearly a score of men, our friend among the number, sprung toward him; but too late. With a wild death-shriek, he rolled into the maddened creek, and those who would have given him forest-burial saw his body tossed downward with fearful velocity and disappear under the eddies of the fierce current!

For a moment all stood gazing in awed silence. There is something in such a death-scene which robs the boldest hearts of all inclination to speak or move for a time. Even the retreating Indians were forgotten. The rescued man was the first to speak.

"Poor Bates!" he said, with a shudder.

The simple words spoken in a tone of commiseration broke the spell which seemed to have come over all. Then, like a flash, every eye was turned upon the speaker with dubious, lowering glances.

"All right; he's hyar. Fred is safe an' sound, savin' us

the trouble of lookin' furder," said a tall, burly fellow, striding close up and placing his hand upon the other's shoulder.

"I needn't say how thankful I am for your timely arrival, boys," returned the latter, not at first noting the significant glances bent upon him. "You came just in time. Three minutes later and it would have been all up with me. I discovered this party yesterday afternoon and watched them while I retreated toward the settlement, taking care to keep from their sight. About three miles back, darkness and that terrible storm overtook me so that I was obliged to halt and seek shelter. I thought I might be mistaken as to their designs; but it appears I was not. What say? Shall we follow the rascals up?"

"Not jest yit. They'll be apt ter hustle off an' stay thar fur a while arter seein' they're expected. 'Sides, we've got another matter tew 'tend tew jest now. Kain't ye guess what 'tis?"

"I can't," said the young man, now beginning to notice the suspicious looks bent upon him froⁿt all sides. "What is it, boys? What's the meaning of these looks?"

"Well got off, by mighty!" returned the burly spokesman. "'Twon't dew ye no good, *this*, Mister Fred Linwood; tell ye *so* much ter start with. Look a hyar! You've jest seen the death of Sim Bates by *daylight*. 'Twás a hard one, mind. Sim was a fust-rate feller—a square, honest hunter. Now, what der ye say ter the *old man's* bein' *pushed off* jest sech a place, only a *wurs* one, an' that in the *darkness*! Would it surprise ye ter hear on't?"

The term "old man" was sufficiently explicit to all of them. It was Archibald Ruggles, the head-man of the settlement, owning about three thousand acres of land, nearly half of which, besides what formed his own plantation, being in process of subjugation by settlers, to whom he had sold on easy terms, thus inducing them to fill up the place till it should become a thriving town. A man, besides, of considerable moneyed wealth for those times, affable and familiar, the friend of every settler, beloved and respected by all, and by none more than by Frederick Linwood. The latter, an orphan, had managed to obtain a good education in England; but left her shores to try his fortune in the new country, where energy

and perseverance might meet with a surer and quicker reward. By great good-fortune, as he thought, he wandered to the Ruggles Settlement, near the junction of the Kanawha and Ohio rivers. And here he had remained, employed by Archibald Ruggles in surveying his lands, and at times wandering in the deep wilds around, hunting its deer, or fishing in the limpid forest-streams. But now, forgetting the scene just enacted, his whole mind was shocked by the fearful import of the settler's words, concerning the "old man."

"What of *him*, Gates? For Heaven's sake, speak out!" said Linwood.

All gathered closer up, forming a complete barricade around the young man.

"I'll tell ye, bein' it's *news!*" said he, called Gates, in a tone of rough sarcasm. "Fust place, Arch'buld Ruggles, whom ye mout know, or leastwise hev *seen*, war *murdered* last night! Ho! don't start; I ain't told 't all yit. Next itum—old black Sam wur nigh murdered with 'im, but hild out long 'nuff arter he wur found, ter tell how 't happened! Count three—or *specerfecashun* three, ez atternys 'ud say: *your* knife, Mister Fred Linwood, wur found near the spot, kivered with blood, an' *by the Great Eternal we've nabbed the murderer!*"

And as the brawny spokesman approached this climax, his huge hand came down, fastening upon young Linwood's shoulder with a vice-like grasp, amid ejaculations of vengeance from the crowd.

Frederick Linwood was brave; but this thrilling announcement, together with the glowering looks bent upon him, caused the blood to recede from his face, leaving it of the pallor of death. Instead of greeting friends, he found himself arrested as the murderer of a man for whom he would have interposed his own life. He had been saved from Indian massacre, only to be arraigned for a foul crime! It is no wonder that for a moment he remained as though speech-bound. Then, with an effort, he recovered himself and was about to speak, when Gates interrupted.

"S'pose ye thought ye wur playin' a cute game, youngster. How long did 't take ye ter skive off inter the woods hyar? How fort'nit thet them Inj'ns happened 'round, chasin' ye jest 'n the right time! 'Twas a clus shave, but I allow ye

wur'u't ter die by *their* hands. No sir! Thet ain't the reg'lar way murderers ar' savved! Ho! D'ye see his face bleach, boys? Why shouldn't it?"

All this in a boisterous, explosive tone, full of suppressed vengeance and sarcasm.

"Hear me, men!" Linwood managed to utter. "As sure as God rules, you are under a fearful mistake. The news of this murder shocks me, as it no doubt did you when you first heard it. I'm as innocent of crime as the child unborn. Most of you have known me since I came to the settlement, a year ago. Look upon me. Do I *look* like one who would do murder?"

"D'ye spose *looks* ar' gwine ter clear ye?" broke in the impetuou's Gates. "D'ye s'pose we've heerd 'bout their bein' deceivin', or d'ye s'pose we're so cussed ignur'nt cos we don't happen ter use pritty words? By th' Eternals—*hyar*, boys, kain't some on' yo show 'im a little of the squar' everdunce?"

"Ay; some on us hez got it sur sartin!" cried some one from the crowd. "You, Bill Ennis."

A strapping fellow—the only one in whose face Linwood could detect the least sympathy—surged closer up, and drew something from his pocket. It was the fragment of a shirt-bosom, on which was a silver button. The accused could not repress a start as he recognized the bosom and its appendage as his own.

"That *hits*, ye see, boys!" cried Gates. "Just, there wur the knife found, and hyar's what the nigger hild, besides 'other everdunce! More'n all, or clinchin' it all, his looks; yes, his looks! It's safe ter gin 'im his own way in the matter o' looks now, for if they don't tell the story as plain as writin', I'll furswear any knowledge of sign in futur'!"

"Men, listen to me for a moment," exclaimed Linwood, in a firmer voice. "In *your* minds every thing seems against me; but I can explain every movement of mine, since I started from the settlement, yesterday morning, on a hunt. I—"

"Course ye kin 'count for it!"

"A rot-durned fool, as well as murderer, ef ye couldn't!"

"'D ye ever hear of one thet wouldn't try ter kiver up his tracks?"

"Who's here thet don't know jest what he's gwine ter git off?"

"Gin 'im a chance, fur all that."

And other ejaculations of like character, all expressive of incredulity, except the last voice, suggesting that young Linwood be heard. It was that of Bill Ennis. Profiting by this momentary lull, the former again spoke.

"Take me at once to the scene of the murder. *There* investigate the matter fully, confronting me with my reputed crime. If you are men you will do this, instead of standing here without even deigning to hear me, or to explain the circumstances of this fearful thing. I demand it in the name of justice!"

"Well said! Good! Take his rifle away, some on ye, an' 'nuther perduce a rope ter bind 'im. We'll perceed reg'-lar!"

"Here's the rifle," responded Linwood; "take it, but don't bind me, boys. There's no necessity. I wouldn't fly if I could."

"The most nat'r'l thing in the world ter say," growled Gates; "but the thing won't take," and he brought down his hands upon the other's arms, in the act of forcing them behind his back.

"Off!" cried Linwood, releasing himself from Gates' grasp, with a strength that surprised the latter. "I'll go back with you, and you shall guard my every step if you will, but not bound like a criminal, till I am proved such."

"By the Eternals, *them* airs won't go down jest now!" said the exasperated spokesman, as he aimed a furious blow at the young hunter; but the latter, huddled up as he was, parried it, and, in turn, dealt one that sent Gates back reeling against his companions.

"Seize the cuss!"

"Rot durn 'im, yis!"

"A dodge ter git out'n our hands!"

"Mebbe we won't make sure on 'im."

"See 'f we don't!"

Amid such imprecations and threats, young Linwood speedily found himself seized, thrown down, and in the grasp of several.

"Thet's what I go in fur—ter make sure on 'im on the spot," vociferated the doubly-enraged Gates, as he recovered himself, and drew close up again. "Hyar's a tree-branch, jest the right size, and full of suple. What's lackin' in ever-dunce? Any thing? No sir! Ketch hold hyar with me, some on ye!"

A number obeyed, and in a twinkling the branch was bent down among the group, requiring three or four of them to keep it in place.

We have said that Linwood was brave; but this action caused him to recoil within himself. He well understood the rough character of border justice, and regretted his hasty speech.

"Wait, men!" he said, hoarsely. "Take me back *bound*, then, if you will, but in the name of God's justice, I ask you to give me some form of a trial—a chance to defend myself!"

"Stan' the whinin' hypercrit up," persisted Gates. "Now fur a rope or sunthin'—any thing two foot long 'll dew!"

"I ask ye all ter halt a bit afore ye perceeed furder!" said the staunch voice of Bill Ennis. "I'll allow things are mighty ag'in' him—that he may be guilty, in fact. I hain't a doubt on it myself; but I hain't *dead sure!* Thar ain't one on ye as is. Fair's fair. Thar ain't one on us, muther, sich a blamed fool as ter think he k'n git out of our hands s'posen he didn't want 'er be bound. He's gi'n it up now. Less take 'im with us, boys. 'Tain't more'n three or four miles, r'member?"

"Not by a thunderin' sight!" roared Gates, as he whirled around, confronting Ennis. "You're soft all ter once on a murderer, *you be*, Bill. D'ye s'pose the old man, what's b'en a brother, father, *every thing* to all on us, ain't gwine ter be avenged quick? Thar kain't be no stronger everdunce—it is as clear as daylight an' *you know it!*"

Both were powerful men, between whom a sort of rivalry existed in regard to measures of safety in and around the settlement. Somewhat of leaders, in fact, among the rough bordermen, equally respected as honest men and good Indian-fighters.

The rest of the crowd stood looking askance at these leaders, as if in doubt as to whose plan should be obeyed. While

matters were thus in abeyance, the prostrate Linwood again spoke.

"Thank you, Bill. I appeal to you, men; follow his advice. Do not refuse me what is accorded to the most degraded of criminals—the right of a trial. I appeal to you, Gates, to await such a result. I understand your honest indignation amid such evidences of my guilt, but do not let it incite you to an unreasonable act."

"Guilty, proberbly; but thar's some sense in what he says."

"Mebbe, then, we'd better wait."

"That's my erpinion."

"Mine tew."

And so this improvised jury of rough backwoodsmen expressed themselves with hardly a dissenting voice.

"Phoo, Gates, let 'em hev thar way then—it's well enuff, fur sartin. Punishment's sure, ye know, an' thar'll nothin' be lost by takin' 'im back. The 'xample, f'rinstance!"

Magnanimous and cunning Bill Ennis! *His* influence had prevailed; but to flatter his rival and save trouble, he asked him to *let* the men have their own way. Strategy worthy of a skilled diplomatist! As he caught the eye of young Linwood he read a volume of gratitude.

"Unreasonable!" growled Gates, glaring at the still prostrate man. "Thet word don't 'pear ter fit 'cordin' ter my notion. But, hev yer way, chaps. We'll take 'im back."

Young Linwood was raised, his hands tied, and then the whole party prepared to return. But, suddenly, they remembered the Indians! Might they not be hovering near? And even if on the retreat, would it not be policy to press them till their final rout should be complete? The matter was argued for a moment and settled by deputing a half-dozen of the company to follow the trail of the savages till satisfied of their movements, and then follow the main party back to the settlement.

The latter division took up its march, following the banks of the creek which had carried off the body of poor Bates, and which also passed through the settlement where Archibald Ruggles had met his death.

CHAPTER II.

THE SEVERED BOND.

But little was said on the way. Frederick Linwood realized the fearful force of circumstances against him. That he was the victim of a plot, the evidence already produced convinced him; as also that said plot was contrived by some person or persons in the settlement. But, who could this or these be? He knew not of a single enemy in the region, and therefore upon no one could he fix the shadow of a suspicion. He had little fear, however, that when the passions of these men should cool, he would be able, by a minute and careful investigation of the case, to convince them of his innocence. But if he should fail! In such a dread contingency, he knew that death would follow quickly on the heels of conviction. Occasionally he met the eyes of Bill Ennis as they turned upon him, but the latter would withdraw his gaze, preserving the same moody silence as his companions.

A large two-story house, standing nearly a mile from any neighbor, so constructed that it might readily be converted into a block for defense; barn and outhouses around it; the group standing upon an elevation which sloped far to the south and east, showing many a cleared space, dotted with the rude dwellings of pioneers. Winding its way through this landscape was the creek already noted.

This was the well-known sight which greeted the eyes of young Linwood, as the party having him in custody emerged from the woods on the north, and soon drew up in front of the Ruggles mansion. Nearly the entire population of the settlement—men, women, and children—had gathered there, wild with excitement, and awaiting further developments.

Almost the first object that caught Linwood's eye, as he glanced around, was the pale face of Carrie Ebingham, who, surrounded by a number of the settlers' wives and daughters, stood at an open window, looking out. She was the orphan niece of the murdered man, and his prospective heir, he him-

self having been a childless widower. Linwood felt a pang go through him as he noticed her glance. But he had no time for reflections concerning her, for a Babel of eager inquiries began at once, constituting, as it proved, the beginning of his trial for murder!

So far as any there knew, the conduct of the young man had been irreproachable since his coming to the Ruggles settlement a year previous. That he had bought a tract of land of the old man, in part payment for which he was to assist in surveying and laying out sections belonging to the latter; that he had, at Ruggles' invitation, made his home at the mansion; that between them the utmost harmony seemed to prevail; that Linwood was an expert hunter, often making excursions alone into the forest, remaining out two or three days at a time: these were propositions so well understood that they were not mentioned even as preliminaries to the trial.

On the other hand was the array of tangible evidence all pointing to him as the guilty party. Archibald Ruggles, it seemed, had gone early in the evening to the cabin of black Sam standing about a mile down the banks of the creek. Sam was his master's favorite servant, to whom was often intrusted the overseeing of work upon the estate.

When he started to return, Sam insisted on accompanying him back, as the night was dark and a storm impending. Having reached a point where the path diverged from a high bluff of the stream, they were assailed by some one, who succeeded in pushing them off the bank. The onset was so sudden that they had little chance for resistance. Black Sam tried, however, and grasped their assailant; but a knife in the latter's hand quickly ended all opposition. But in falling, the negro caught the shirt-bosom of his antagonist, already recognized as belonging to the prisoner, and tore it out. A piercing shriek came from his master as he struck upon the rocks jutting above the waters of the creek, and was whirled down by the current, even then rapid and strong. Black Sam, providentially, struck a ledge of rock that protruded from the bank, and with desperate strength succeeded in crawling upon it, where he lost consciousness. He was thus discovered in the early morning, and this living witness Frederick Linwood now confronted. It was evident that the negro could not long sur-

vive. Besides the knife-thrust in his shoulder, he had received injuries about the head and back, from which it seemed hardly possible that he could recover. But with a sorrowful earnestness, he maintained that the voice of his master's murderer was that of Frederick Linwood. The latter questioned him for himself in the presence of the whole crowd, without changing his opinion. And even if he had convinced the negro that he had mistaken the voice, what would it have availed in view of the fact that the shirt-rusle, torn from the assailant during the short struggle, was Linwood's. And further, the remaining part of the shirt, stained with blood in two or three places, was found a few rods above the scene of the murder, lodged in some bushes that lined the bank. Inference—that in the excitement of the moment, the murderer had taken it off, unwittingly sought to destroy it by throwing it into the creek, but that it had thus providentially lodged, that it might come up in judgment against the assassin.

As Frederick Linwood confronted these additional links of evidence against him, as he saw the bloody knife—his own—found near the spot, and then met the score of flashing eyes bent upon him, he braced himself, as best he might, for the fearful ordeal. He gave a minute account of his movements since the preceding morning, and with an eloquence born of the trying occasion, endeavored to show that he was the victim of a plot—that some one else had perpetrated the deed, seeking to throw the dire result upon himself. And finally, that though circumstances were against him, no motive had been assigned that could, in the light of his previous good character, reasonably be deemed sufficient to incite him to the deed. At this point, the stern backwoods advocate again spoke.

"This way, Searle—if that's a motive wantin', it's fur us ter show what it *mout* be, an' *was*! Don't be back'ard—*jestice is jestice*."

And from the outer circle of the dense, excited crowd, came Dorlon Searle, a young man about Linwood's own age, and with whom the latter had always been on terms of cordial friendship. He, also, was an inmate of the Ruggles mansion, being a sort of secretary to the old man, and whom the latter intended to install as teacher to the children of the settlement as soon as a suitable building for the school should be pro-

vided. For the past two weeks he had been partially confined to his room by illness, and was yet far from being well, as his pale face and trembling limbs attested.

"Good heaven, Linwood!" he said, as he came face to face with the latter, for the first time during the scene.

"The rest on it--'other everdunce or motives, whichever ye call it--out with it!" cried the excited crowd, as Searle paused, covering his face with his hands, looking the impersonation of sorrow and regret.

"Go on, young man--justice now, not friendship, remember!" arose the voice of Gates.

"I hate to say it, Fred--God knows I do," said Searle. "But--before you set out yesterday morning, did not you and Archibald Ruggles have some hard words in regard to--to--*Carrie*? And was there not a *threat*?"

In spite of himself, Linwood started as though stung by an adder! The next moment he regretted it; but it was a moment too late! The excited crowd, every one of them a juror, eager to catch at every straw, had noticed his perturbation.

Living beneath the same roof, thrown more or less into her society, it was impossible for him not to admire, ay, love, one so spirited, beautiful and accomplished as Carrie Effingham. And Linwood had flattered himself that she felt more than a common interest in him, though he had never allowed himself to broach the subject of love or marriage. For he knew that, while her uncle was one of the very best of men, he entertained aspirations for his niece, such as would, at present, prevent one in his humble circumstances from obtaining the old man's sanction to their union, even if Carrie herself could be won. And yet, he had hoped in time to pave the way to the favor of both uncle and niece, and make the latter his bride.

Before setting off on the preceding morning, Ruggles had taken him aside and questioned him in regard to a rumor afloat, that Linwood had openly boasted of his betrothal to his niece. Indignant at the slander, the young man had repudiated it, and expressed his determination to seek out, if possible, the author, and punish him as he deserved. Both men were excited during the interview, and both felt a strong

Indignation against the unknown slanderer—for that it was a slander, Carrie's uncle had no doubt. A part of this interview had been “accidentally overheard” by Searle, who thence judged that the men had quarreled, and testified, reluctantly it seemed, that Linwood had left the house with a threat upon his lips, *against Archibald Ruggles!*

It will readily be perceived that Linwood's version of the affair had but little weight with men whose prejudices were so wrought up by other and more tangible evidence. In fact, taken in connection with the emotion Linwood had betrayed, it was considered as a weak device of the prisoner, and unworthy of further notice.

“Told ye so from the fust!” vociferated the unrelenting Gates. “It's plain as daylight. Ye've all on ye heerd the everdunce, an' *seen* it. Hyar's the knife with blood on it. 'Twas found on the spot of the murder. Who don't know it's *his'n*? Hyar's the part of shirt-busom with the button on it, an' 'twas found in the nigger's fist, jest as he'd tore it out in the death-grip. This chap don't deny ary pieces of everdunce. More'n all's the testermony of black Sam, near his death, likely. He allus had a good understandin' with the pris'ner. D'y'e s'pose he'd sw'ar on the steps of etarnity that the murderer is Linwood, ef 'twon't him? An' furder, the black domestic remembers hearin' some one come in 'bout midnight, an' the steps sounded 's if goin' towards *his* room. Course, arter doin' the devilish act, an' throwin' away the shirt, he wanted *another*, afore skulkin' off ter the woods! An' 'ithout meanin' any offense to Miss Carrie, who *b'lees* what Linwood says consarnin' the natur' of his threats to the old man? Who'd heerd any thing 'bout this 'ere *rumor*, an' who's set it goin' but hisself? Fact on't is, he'd got above his business—asked the old man fur the hand of his niece—was refused, an' was desprit 'nough ter hope ter git *her* by puttin' him aside by *exerdunt!* I tell ye, *every thing* p'ints to it. An' now, what d'y'e say—is he guilty or not guilty?”

Scarcely had this rude summing up been concluded, and even before the fatal question was fully uttered, a shout, as with one voice, burst from the crowd:

“*Guilty!*”

“Then, by th' Eternals, thar's only one thing more—an'

the sooner the better!" said Gates. "*Ter the big tree, back of the house!*"

Before young Linwood could realize it, he was seized and borne quickly to the designated place, amid shouts and imprecations. At this moment Carrie Ellingham, pale as marble, pressed in among the throng and stood face to face with the condemned.

"For the sake of heaven, men, desist yet longer!" she said, when the tumult of savage voices ceased for a moment. "Give him time to prepare for death. Circumstances are against him, but, oh, he may be guiltless. My God, Linwood, you can not be a murderer?"

"God bless you for the words, Miss Ellingham. As I hope for His mercy hereafter, I am innocent."

"It's no place for sech as you, Miss Carrie," interposed several voices. "The blood of yer uncle, gal, calls from the ground. 'Tain't no use; you k'n read his fate in the looks of every man hyar!"

"Let me urge you, Miss Ellingham," said Dorlon Searle, as he placed his hand upon her arm, his face as marble-like as her own. "It is, as Gates says, no place for one like you. Go back to the house, and I promise you I will do what I can to save, or at least stay, these fearful proceedings."

Unable to dispute the fearful evidence against Linwood, yet feeling a horror at the thought that one so promising should die by the rope, she was conducted back to the house by the friendly hand of Bill Ennis, leaving Searle to use his influence with the crowd, to stay the execution. The brow of Ennis was gloomy, and his reply to her question, as to the probability of Linwood's innocence, was only a shake of the head.

Meantime the condemned man found it impossible to use further remonstrance, as the preparations for his execution went forward. A rope was hastily procured, and one end thrown over a large branch about ten feet from the ground. Then, all hope left him, and he tried to summon fortitude to die as a brave man and a Christian. The net was woven so skillfully around him that he must die as a murderer; but he prayed that some time the vail might be lifted by Omnipotence, the mystery brought to light, and his own name cleared from a soul stain!

He had noticed the interposition of Dorlon Searle with Carrie, had heard part of his words to her; but when the latter turned, weak and trembling, toward the house, he saw that Searle did nothing, said nothing, to restrain the crowd. Then, for the first time, a suspicion flashed through his mind that Searle himself was his enemy, the one who had plotted against him, the one who had committed the murder! As the suspicion gathered force in his mind, he attempted to make himself heard, for a number of circumstances occurred to his mind, which confirmed his suspicion. But he could not do so before the rope was placed about his neck and his hands tied, amid jeers and imprecations loud and mingled. He tried to struggle, with voice and limbs, but it was worse than useless.

A dozen willing hands grasped the rope.

"All ready! Up with the murderer of Arch'buld Ruggles!" shouted the voice of Gates above the din.

The first strain had been given on the rope, the cruel knot began to tighten about Linwood's neck, when a cracking was heard close by, and a stentorian voice shouted:

"Rally yer rifles there! Every man! quick! fur yer lives! the Indians are upon us!"

And before the sounds of the startling voice died away, they were succeeded by Indian war-cries in fearful proximity to the spot.

No settler went for a moment without his rifle in those days, when Indian attacks were frequent and bloody. With one accord the men bounded to meet the foe; while the women and children, who had been lingering in a sort of fascination near the scene, rushed into the mansion. In less time than it takes us to describe it, the reports of rifles, the whizzing of arrows, and the fierce shouts of battle came from the edge of the woods, not thirty rods distant. And the condemned man was left, with his arms and feet bound, the rope-noose about his neck; left till his executioners should beat off the savages and return to finish their work with him. More than one bullet sung by him; one struck the limb over which hung the fatal rope!

Suddenly he heard a step behind him, and turning his head beheld Carrie Ellingham. Like a flash of light she dashed

forward, seized a knife that lay upon the ground, and cut the prisoner's bonds!

"Flee for your life, Frederick Linwood," she said. "I can not think you a murderer, and if you *were*, your death could not bring back the life of my poor uncle. I trust the result of my action, with my conscience and my God. There is your rifle and ammunition under the tree."

He sprung forward, possessed himself of these, then turned his face toward Carrie.

"As sure as my Creator lives I am innocent. Until this mystery is cleared up, I will not rest day or night. There is one in the settlement whom I suspect as the real murderer, and that one—"

"Fly, Linwood! quick, or you are lost. Some one is returning this way. I will hope and wait for your vindication!"

While thus speaking, she disappeared behind some bushes that stretched from the tree to the back-entrance of the mansion. Linwood bounded away toward the right, and had gone but a few rods when a rifle cracked, and a bullet sped by, within a few inches of his head. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw Dorlon Searle, and then sped away for dear life. He could hear the noise of conflict, and judged by it that the Indians were being driven off.

This was indeed the case. The attacking party was the same one which had pressed Linwood so closely, and from which he had been saved by his would-be executioners scarcely three hours before. Burning with vengeance they had halted in their retreat, discovered the little party sent to watch their movements, and turned upon them. In the running fight that ensued, two of the whites were shot down, but the rest kept in advance of their fierce pursuers till within a half-mile of the settlement. Betaking themselves to the trees, they endeavored to hold their foes in check till one of their number should have time to reach the mansion and give the alarm. To the success of this plan was Linwood indebted for his life. The red-skins, finding themselves outwitted and outnumbered, retreated after the first volley, unable even to snatch away the bodies of their slain. Though the rout of the Indians was complete, the settlers would have pursued

them further, had it not been for the tragic business awaiting their action. They therefore hurried back, with speed redoubled, when they heard the rifle and shouts of Searle.

Not all of them unscathed, however. Three were borne by their comrades, who would never again look upon the blue skies and virgin forests. But their sad fate did not deter the rest from immediate pursuit when they found that Linwood had escaped. The face of Searle bore a scowl of uneasiness, as he led in the direction taken by the prisoner. None seemed more anxious for Linwood's recapture than he. His recent looks of illness seemed gone; but the fact was unnoticed, save by one man, and that man was Bill Ennis.

How had the prisoner been freed from his bonds?

Carrie Essingham soon found that none about the mansion had seen or even suspected the part she had taken in behalf of the escaped prisoner. She learned of the way in which Linwood's release had been accounted for by the settlers, and was content to keep her own counsel. Something deeper than evidence or reason whispered her that Frederick Linwood was innocent of crime—that he would, in time, ferret out the real criminal, and thus *prove* his innocence. Deep as was her horror and grief on account of her uncle's fate, she was diverted somewhat from her own sorrows in trying to comfort the bereaved women who had lost husbands or brothers in the recent forest battles.

It was late in the afternoon when the pursuers came back, moody and dispirited. The search for Linwood had proved futile. He was at liberty, in the unbounded forest.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAILER.

The sun was yet hovering above the western horizon, but almost the gloom of night had settled in the forest-depths. A man, wearing the garb and accoutrements of a hunter, was moving silently, and yet with considerable speed, down the

banks of the Ohio, a score of miles distant from the Ruggles settlement. Now and then he would pause a moment to listen, glancing backward into the gloom with eyes that seemed to pierce the somber depths. He had been running hard, as was attested by the rapid upheaving of his breast; but no sounds of fatigue issued from his lips. Gradually his pace slackened, and finally he halted by the side of a gigantic tree. For fifteen or twenty minutes he remained crouched at its base, with his ear to the ground, listening. At the end of that time he rose with an audible breath of relief, turned about, and began to retrace his steps, going up the banks of the stream.

"Huh! Gi'n't up, hev ye? Mout's well. Tried ter hood-wink, run down, use up, exterminate, cut an' slash inter Trailer Tom afore now, hain't ye? Jes' let 'im know when he's bagged, if ye'd as lieve. When ye *dew* dew it, ye k'n silebrate the effair in a month of pow-wows, sur's I keer. But, I'm bound ter foller ye up, reds! Ye've made me pump wind oncommon hard fur the last hour, I'll allow. Jest 'cos I happened ter be goin' the same way you was, you wa'n't content with my steppin' aside, but had ter be so dumbed foolish as ter try ter make me travel in yer dirty comperny. B'en up ter some devilmint *somechar*, an' got licked *tew*, ef I ain't gre'tly mistaken. An' now may I be slashed ef I don't foller ye furder'n ye did me. I'll Parn what ye mout be up tew ef't takes me forty mile."

A strange man, Tom Hawk, the Trailer—a type of a class of men that could find no existence supportable except it were in the forest; almost as primitive in their habits as the Indians themselves, with whom they constantly disputed the right of occupancy. Men who could be as stoical in the presence of death as their red foes; yet retaining that loquacious humor, or habit of talking to themselves when alone, except when silence was necessary by reason of danger, or because of the want of exciting topics to occupy their minds.

Hence the foregoing soliloquy, muttered half aloud, as the hunter continued his course up the stream. With body half bent, he moved so stealthily that hardly the rustle of a leaf could be heard beneath his feet. In this manner he had gone back nearly a half-mile on his course, when he again stopped,

sinking to the ground as noiselessly as a shadow. His trained senses had detected those almost imperceptible sounds which tell of lurkers near by.

"Ye was mistaken, Tom, that's sartin. The varmints hain't git ye up. Couldn't run ye down, nor fight ye down, so they're gwine fur ter steal ye! What's called *strategy* by captains an' gin'rals. Jes' so. Mebbe I'm used ter that, mebbe I hain't!"

This to himself, but not without having every sense on the alert. Presently the sounds became more audible, and the hunter detected a form moving toward him, not ten yards away. An Indian—one of his late pursuers beyond all doubt. Would the savage pass without noticing him? If so, he might thus dodge the whole band, who, he now felt persuaded, were scattered about, hoping to come upon him by stealth.

But this was not to be. Trailer Tom marked the approach of his foe, and saw that a struggle was inevitable. The Indian could hardly fail of gliding directly over the spot where he lay concealed. With knife in hand, he hugged the ground till the Indian was almost over him. Then, quick and noiseless as a flash, the hunter shot upright and grasped the Indian's throat with his left hand, while his right plunged a knife to the very hilt in the victim's breast! One mighty, convulsive shiver, and the red-man was jerked down and held so firmly that no groan, not even a struggling limb, could break the stillness. For this Trailer Tom was a very Titan in strength, able, in rough sport, to "handle" two ordinary men with ease.

A few moments of suspense—and then, as the white released his grasp of the dead savage, he heard a light tread on his left, and in a few seconds he saw another form advancing in a line of dangerous proximity to the spot where he lay. In that direction, also, a little light gleamed from the river. Should this other savage pass near enough, he might therefore discover the hunter in time to sound the alarm before engaging in the struggle. Tom ventured to draw his body a foot or two aside, and then lay motionless as the dead warrior near him.

In vain, however. The new-comer was passing within arrow-length of the spot, when he paused, peering suspiciously aside. Was it instinct, or his keen vision-sense, that made the

red-man bend toward the half-concealed body of his slain companion?

A pair of keen eyes were noting his slightest movement; and as a knowledge of the truth seemed to dawn upon the fellow's mind, a rifle-muzzle was suddenly thrust with tremendous force against his breast; a dark figure sprung over him, and a hatchet crashed through his skull! Not, however, before he had given utterance to a stifled death-shriek, that rung out with startling distinctness! And simultaneous with the cry came the rush of many feet toward the spot whence it issued.

In less time than it takes to record it, the hunter darted, with as little noise as possible, toward the river—his only chance of escape, now that the Indians were closing upon him from behind, above and below.

But, what chance would the river afford? Would there not be enemies lying in wait upon its verge? And if, happily, not, would not the warning cries of those behind him, not yet heard, arouse others to seek him on the shore?

A few moments, and the river gleams before him, its waters yet surging and roaring from the effects of the late storm. As he came to the brink he paused a second to note if possible the proximity of his foes. At the very moment of doing so his ears were greeted with savage cries and yells. He knew by the sounds that his victims were discovered, and that a score of avenging red-men were converging toward the spot where he stood. A desperate though by no means hopeless expedient suggested itself. To secrete his accoutrements in the bushes, and take to the water, floating with the current, and trusting to the gathering darkness for the success of the ruse!

Tom was about to carry out this project, when a large canoe loomed out of the deep shade, close to the bank, where the waters were less turbulent. It was not three rifle-lengths below him, and was being pushed along by a single Indian. Commotion within the woods had prevented the warrior from noticing the white. The fact induced an instantaneous change in the latter's programme. Poising his hatchet he hurled it with lightning precision. It struck the Indian's head, and tumbled him into the river with a splash. Before the waters had hardly closed over the warrior, Trailer Tom occupied his

vacated place in the canoe, and began to propel it with giant sweeps from the bank. Nearer came the yells, now mingled like those of yelping hounds when about to grapple with the famished stag. The hunter strained every nerve, for it was yet light enough on the river line for the savage posse to discover him the moment they should burst from the forest-cover.

He had placed a dozen rods between the canoe and shore, when a slight agitation in the canoe bottom attracted his notice, and glancing down he saw the figure of a man tightly bound and gagged. To cut the prisoner's bonds with his ready knife, and tear the gag from his mouth, was the work of a moment.

"Good mighty!" ejaculated Tom, peering into the prisoner's face, hardly able to distinguish its color. "Red 'r white—*which?*"

A long-drawn breath, an attempt to stretch out the cramped limbs, and a faint "white," was the only reply; and even this was interrupted by a clearer burst of yells as the savages rushed to the water's edge!

There was no time for further inquiry. Snatching up the paddle, the hunter wielded it with a power and skill which proved him used to the task. The savages did not at once discover the canoe, but were darting like foiled wolves, up and down the bank. Could the Trailer push thirty yards further out before attracting their attention, he would be beyond reach of arrow or bullet in that uncertain twilight. But even as he thought thus, unusual yells of rage on shore told him that the discovery of the wounded and half-drowned savage, and also of the receding canoe, were simultaneous.

"Down quick, my good friend! There's a few rifles among the gang yonder," suddenly cried the rescued man, who by this time had somewhat recovered the use of his limbs and voice.

Hawk obeyed just as a volley of arrows and two or three rifles were discharged at the canoe. A bullet struck the prow, and several arrows whizzed over them with a velocity that would have proved fatal if arrested.

"Ye-o-o-op!" yelled the Trailer, exultingly. "Good *squaws*—ye shot well?" But this taunting shout did not deter him from grasping the paddle the moment the volley passed, and

working with utmost energy. He did not glance toward his unknown companion till a sheet of flame burst from the canoe, and a bullet flew into the midst of the Indian crowd upon shore.

"May I be slashed!" he said, in a tone of surprise, as he jerked his head toward the rescued man, who had fired the shot. "A trump, whoever ye be! That's *sed*, strenger! We'll hev a reg'lar talk bimeby, mind."

"It will keep the rascals yonder in some confusion till we get further off," replied the other.

"Jes' so. Sartin. Lucky that Injun hed his shootin'-iron with 'im in the canoe," replied Tom, still laboring with the paddle.

"His and my own, too," responded the unknown. "Ha, look out! They're after us with another volley!"

Both men dropped low in the canoe, and the expected volley swept over it. Hardly had its echoes resounded from the shore, when Trailer Tom sprung upright, grasped his own rifle and both men fired together. A yell from the pack on shore told that the leaden messengers had effect. It was answered by an exultant shout from Hawk, who again took the paddle.

Before the savages could rally for another volley, the fugitives were out of sight and reach, floating with the rapid current. Twilight had faded out, but the stars began to appear, dimly showing their course. Tom turned the head of the canoe toward shore, and in a short time reached a miniature river-bay full three miles below the scene of the skirmish. Here their craft floated in comparatively quiet waters. He drew in his paddle and took a rapid survey of his unknown companion. A young man of medium size, snugly built, with an outline of countenance denoting firmness and resolution. This he could see, even in the dim light, and also that his face was deadly pale. The survey only required a moment —the hunter's tongue loosened.

"Give us yer grub, strenger. In a fix, wa'n't ye? Got took, *fool'd*, I s'pose. Orter been keerful. Yip! didn't we lick 'em clean? Don't they feel foolish arter tryin' ter nab Trailer Tom? Couldn't be contint with a bird in hand, could they? Tried to catch 'nuther an' lost both. *Some* with a rifle, you be. That's *sed*—know it?"

"The best thing I know is that I have been rescued by Tom Hawk," responded the other, almost writhing under the clasp of the hunter. "I owe my life to you, brave man."

"S'posin' ye dew? Needn't worry over it. I mout name lots that I've *snatched*, jest as Ihev you. But how d'ye know I'm Tom Hawk?" queried the hunter, in a tone of pride.

"Because his name is known throughout the border, and because you announced the fact yourself just now."

"It mout be. Don't remember fur sartin. I hev ter talk sometimes ter myself. What--good mighty--now, may I be slashed if *that* ain't pritty!"

These abrupt exclamations from Tom were caused by his companion, who suddenly reeled forward, and would have fallen had not the hunter caught him. He was in a fainting condition. Hawk threw water into his face, and chafed his limbs, giving utterance meanwhile to a string of quaint comments.

"Jes' so. I see how 'tis. A good instermunt, but the strings hez been strained tew high, 'nd hev c'llapsed a trifle. Best on 'em will. No knowin' how long he'd be'n layin' crooked up, an' *that* gag in his mouth. Couldn't stood *that* long myself. Mighty, no. Should hev busted right off. No, I'd hev *blowed* it out. Know I should. Should've thought *he* might. Good pair of bellusses inside, I reckon. Hirrup, youngster! Comin' tew? Streten up! Try it ag'in. Thar Don't be foolish. Yer legs tremble lik a sick kitten's."

The unknown had by this time revived somewhat, and sat upright in the canoe. He pressed his hand to his forehead.

"Oh, well," he muttered, "I was near fainting."

"Guess ye were. Orter waited till thar were more time ter dew it," said Tom, but in a tone of kindness not misunderstood.

"I've been pressed hard, my friend," said the other, in a weak tone. "Since about this time yesterday I've not tasted of food or drink!"

"Good mighty! I overlooked how *that* mout be. Tew bad. Kain't go more'n a week 'ithout eatin' myself, an' my stomach is double-coated tew. Hyar, take this. It'll open the valves of yer 'natermy an' set the blood ter workin'.

' Not *tew* much, mind. It's preshus p'ison stuff at sartin times."

He handed the young man a small flask containing rum. The latter swallowed a small portion of the liquor and then returned the flask.

" Thet'll stay ye up till we k'n dew better. We'll land now—Injuns or no Injuns. Thet's *sed*. They hain't hed time ter git up fur as this, an' I don't b'l'eve they'll come at all. I'll see 'bout it soon."

He pushed the canoe close under the bank, where it lay in almost total darkness. Then, with a word of caution to the young man, he abruptly left him, stealing away into the forest as silently as a shadow. In a quarter of an hour he returned.

" It's all right," he said. " Got humsick, them reds hev. 'Cos they knowed my yell. How d'ye feel?"

" Better," said his companion. " But I'm very weak from hunger."

" Course ye be. Hyar, I orter gi'n it tew ye afore. 'Tain't very tender, but a starvin' man 's no bisniss ter be pertic'lar."

He drew from a pouch at his side a quantity of dried venison. Both partook of it, the young man sparingly at first. He soon began to feel stronger. Under the rough exterior of the Trailer he detected an undereurrent of kindness and sympathy.

" Now, what mout I call ye, an' how 'd ye come in the fix I found ye in, youngster? I'd as lieve know if the question 's fair?" Tom said, at last.

" I was run down by the Indians and captured an hour or two before sunset," replied the young man. " They had been defeated in an attack upon a settlement east of us, and were on the retreat. I was retreating from the place too, having escaped from those who would have hung me for a crime committed by another."

" Huh!" ejaculated Tom Hawk. " Jes' so—mebbe. I'll see. What more?"

Frederick Linwood—for it was he—gave the particulars of his recent trial, sentence, and escape, and also of his later capture by the Indians, which we need not repeat. The recital occupied some time, for the young man fully explained

his dilemma and told his suspicions as to who was the real murderer of Archibald Ruggles. Hawk listened throughout with the closest attention, occasionally giving utterance to those expletives so characteristic of the man.

"I intended from the first to find you if possible, for I thought you would hear my story and help me," said Linwood in conclusion. "I mean to fight the thing through, ferret out the real murderer, or lose my own life in the attempt. It's a difficult case, I know. There's hardly a man in the settlement but would shoot me at sight, so strong is the feeling against me."

"Good mighty! Ye're in a bad box, sartin?" said the Trailer, gravely. "I hain't seen yer face *clear*, but I ken read signs in a man's voice an' gin'ral make-up. Kain't say thet I doubt yer statemints. But, by yer own account every thing's clean ag'in' ye. P'raps ye'd better gin it up an' trust ter time ter clear ye."

"No!" said Linwood, firmly. "Existence is no object with such a foul stain upon my character. I'll clear my name, establish my entire innocence, or die in the attempt, as I've said. I thought I might count on your aid. If not, I'll try it alone."

"Yip?" exclaimed Tom, rising suddenly and grasping Linwood's hand. "A trump, *you* be. Clear stuff all through. *That's* the sperit. Only tryin' ye. Look a hyar! I'll stick tew ye. *That's* sed. Glory! It'll be jist *fuz* fur me. Want sunthin' of the kind ter keep my wits clear. Know it? Come in hyar furder. Ye need rest first thing. I need a trifle on't myself. Made me pump wind uncommon, the reds did; but that's squar'd as ye know. The moon'll be up 'bout midnight. Then we'll rouse up an' make fur a place handy ter that very settlement. No livin' human knows on't 'cept me. We k'n lay *ter* that, and see what we k'n hit on."

Linwood expressed his gratitude, and the two men shook hands in ratification. Then they sought repose in the thick bushes till the moon rose. Hawk roused Linwood, who had slept heavily. The hunter led the way as one acquainted with every rod of the forest. About two hours before daylight he paused beside what appeared in the forest gloom to be a sort of rocky mound. Parting some heavy bushes and

removing a few loose pieces of rock, he crept forward, directing Linwood to follow. The young man obeyed, and presently found himself in a rugged, irregular cavity in the rocks large enough to enable both to stand upright.

"The raudervos I told ye of," remarked Tom. "'Tain't more than five or six mile from the Ruggles settlement. We kin fix up our plans here an' carry 'em out when the time comes."

A quantity of dry boughs were in a corner of the cave, upon which they threw themselves. As the first gray dawning appeared, Linwood awoke from a sound sleep and found his companion absent. He crept forth from the rock covert, and to his surprise saw, not far from the entrance, the standing fragment of a tree, which had been shivered by the lightning. The cave from which he had just emerged was exactly opposite the place, not thirty feet distant, where he alone had passed the preceding night of storm.

CHAPTER IV.

HOLED.

He looked around for his friend, but the latter was not to be found. Wondering where he could have gone, Linwood made a circuit of the rocky elevation, and at last discovered what he judged to be the trail. He followed it for some distance into the forest, until at last he lost it altogether. So intent had he been thus far in tracing the steps of the hunter that he had not noticed the direction of those steps. But now, as he paused and glanced more particularly around, he saw that they were in the direction of the settlement. The discovery puzzled him, and also gave him a feeling of uneasiness. What was Tom Hawk's errand? Why had he departed without awaking him? Had he resolved to visit the settlement alone, to make investigation? If so, it seemed strange that the Trailer should not first have awakened him and apprised him of his intention. For a single instant a

dark thought entered his mind. Had Tom begun to doubt the truth of his story and gone to the settlement for the purpose of betraying him? This was only a passing thought, rejected as absurd almost as soon as conceived. Whatever might be the strange man's reasons for departing so stealthily, Linwood felt that they were good ones. He therefore turned and began to retrace his steps toward the cave, resolved to await as patiently as possible the return of his friend. He had not gone far, however, before he heard the report of a rifle far away toward the right of his path. It occurred to him that Tom Hawk was the author of the shot, and that he was in quest of the game which should furnish them with food. He turned aside and bringing his own rifle to a trail, hurried in the direction of the shot.

He had not gone more than fifty yards when suddenly he encountered three Indian warriors. Not face to face, for the Indians had come in a direction that brought them into his path, a few rods ahead. It was evident that they, too, had heard the rifle-report, and were pressing on to discover its author. They were dressed in their war-paint, and two of them carried rifles, while the third was armed with bow, arrows, and hatchet.

Linwood conjectured at once that their object was to hang around the settlement and cut off, one by one, such of the settlers as might chance to come near their ambush. It was not unfrequent for even single warriors to be thus daring, either to gain a reputation in their tribe for great bravery, or for the sake of avenging the death of some of their near kindred. Possibly the warriors before him were of the party which had twice been repulsed on the preceding day, and were now intent on a mission of vengeance.

As these thoughts passed through his mind, he sprung as noiselessly as possible behind the nearest tree, hoping to escape their notice. The moment this was done he became conscious that they, too, had suddenly stopped, having probably heard his movement or caught a glimpse of him as he sought cover.

For a moment, a slight tremor shook the frame of the young man. He had participated with the settlers in a number of Indian skirmishes, but, alone, he was far from being an adept in forest warfare. Besides, the trials through which he had

recently passed had left him yet somewhat weak. But bracing himself as best he might, he awaited the action of the three warriors. He believed that his friend could not be far off, and the thought gave him courage.

The Indians exchanged a few words in their own tongue, and began to move back toward him. Linwood glanced behind him. The ground was a little sloping from the tree to a cluster of bushes growing between two large boulders not ten feet away. Instantly dropping to the base of the tree, he went backward, on hands and knees, and in a few seconds was peering from the bushes between the rocks.

The savages, meantime, had spread out on either side, and advanced cautiously. Suddenly he saw one of them peering from the side of a tree, which commanded a view of the position he himself had just vacated.

The fellow uttered an exclamation of surprise, left his cover, and was immediately joined by his companions, who emerged from cover on the opposite side. The young man watched them anxiously. They looked into each other's faces for a moment, and then two of them turned, apparently convinced that their ears or sight had deceived them. But as they turned in the direction of the rifle-report, their companion, evidently a more experienced warrior, drew them back by an expressive grunt. In fact, the trio had arrived and swept the spot with their eyes so quickly after hearing Linwood, or catching a glimpse of his movements, that only this one had thought it necessary to look for a trail; but looking back he discovered signs of a lurker, and with his companions traced Linwood's course within a few feet of the tree, where it was lost on the slate-stone fragments scattered around.

But there was no need of further evidence to convince them that a lurker was near. With weapons ready, they glanced sharply around, and almost instantly detecting the disturbed condition of the bushes between the rocks, bounded toward them.

It is needless to say the concealed man watched their movements with the most intense anxiety. The moment he saw them tracing his steps toward the tree, he carefully raised his rifle, intending to shoot down one of those who carried rifles, and then to take the only alternative remaining, which would

be to seek safety in flight. But fate was against him. His rifle missed fire, and he had hardly gained an upright position before the trio were upon him. He was quickly seized and dragged from the bushes, amid exclamations of savage triumph. There was mutual recognition between the prisoner and his captors. As Linwood had before surmised, they were of the party from whom he had been rescued by the Trailer. They held a consultation, but it was brief. Linwood thought he could divine its import. That the Big Hunter was not far away, probably unconscious of their presence in the vicinity, and might, therefore, by the exercise of great caution, be killed or captured. He could see that their Indian ambition was aroused to the highest pitch. The success of their undertaking would make them the most distinguished braves in their tribe.

Securing his arms behind, and taking his rifle, they hurried him to some distance aside from the path and paused within the shelter of some high, dense bushes. Here Linwood was left in charge of the youngest warrior, while the other two started off in the direction of the shot lately heard.

The young man lay upon his back in the bushes while his savage guard took a position outside, where he could watch the forest, and note the slightest sound. As a double precaution, he had bound his prisoner's feet, so the latter could not think of escape. Linwood, however, did not lose all hope. He had great faith in the tact and bravery of his friend; and still he knew, by the few expressive gestures made by the two Indians, as they set off, that if they did not return at a certain time, their companion was to dispatch the prisoner, secure his scalp, and then seek for them through the forest.

An hour passed, and Linwood plainly saw, notwithstanding his prostrate position, that his dusky guard was growing impatient. His keen eyes were constantly sweeping the forest. Once or twice he had ventured a short distance away, and returned with a glance at his prisoner which boded no good to the latter.

Linwood endeavored to maintain an outward composure, but in spite of himself, great beads of perspiration oozed from his brow. He felt that his end was near. It was hard to die thus, without the chance of making the least defense. And

harder still, with the thought that he might only be remembered as a criminal—that she whom he loved, and who saved him from the gallows, might hate his memory. He tried to divert his mind from these harrowing thoughts, and to prepare to meet his fate like a man.

Suddenly his guard glanced at the position of the sun, and then around at his prisoner, loosening the hatchet in his girdle as he did so. Linwood was about to close his eyes, when a heavy stone came crashing through a section of the bushes, and striking the Indian in his head, knocked him senseless to the earth. Bounding steps were heard close by, and Trailer Tom sprung into the bushes by the side of his friend.

"May I be slashed if 'tain't jest as I thought," he exclaimed, as he released Linwood, who immediately rose to his feet. "Thet's *twice* snatched, 'ithin' four an' twenty hours! Curi's, should say. Hurt any?"

"No. There are two others not far off. Did you see them?"

"Seen thar trail, which is 'bout the same thing, I reckon," replied Tom. "Run onto it while goin' arter the deer which I tuk on a run, at long range. I let the cretur' lay, an' tracked the reds till I seen they'd come this way."

"'Twas lucky you came as you did. I think this fellow was about to kill me."

They had emerged from the bushes, and now stood near the Indian, in whom life was extinct, the stone having broken his skull.

"You arter b'en keerfuller. No sense in bein' tuk as you was. Foolish, I allow. Thet's sed."

"I didn't suppose there was a savage within twenty miles of here."

"What if ye didn't? Orter staid in the cave till I got back."

"What's to be done now?"

"Tend ter them reds fust. Don't want them botherin' round hyar. Mighty, no! Arter *that* we'll git the deer to the cave, an' then eat. Mout as well own thet *I'm* hungry a trifle."

Tom Hawk's manner was as cool as though the task before them was nothing more than a regular morning's duty. Linwood, at that moment, admired the rough hunter more than

he ever had the most renowned heroes of whom he had heard. He himself caught something of the Trailer's even, cool spirit. The latter stooped over the Indian, appropriated his hatchet in place of the one he had lost, and gave Linwood the warrior's knife, after having quickly severed a large portion of his long, coarse hair.

"What use do you make of that?" Linwood asked, in surprise.

"Tell ye afore long," replied the hunter, as he secured it about him. "Now, if yer sure yer rifle is all right, come on, for them reds kain't be fur off by this time."

Turning, he struck off nearly in the direction of the cave. Linwood was somewhat surprised, for the two Indians had gone in an almost opposite direction. He made no remark, however. It was all he could do to keep near his leader. The latter suddenly stopped beside a pile of rocks, and dropped to his knees, Linwood following his example.

"Keep your eyes to the left," whispered Tom. "If they've got to whar my trail turned, they've siperated, in course."

Linwood did as directed, and for several minutes the two remained motionless as statues. At last Linwood ventured to turn his head toward the Big Hunter, and saw that his keen gray eyes were directed toward the opposite side of a gully, about a hundred yards away. At the same instant the notes of a whippowil came from a dense thicket beyond the gully.

"Jes' so, Mister Red," muttered Tom, in a whisper. "Thet ar' tells me jest as much as 't does your chum. Look out fur 'im, youngster. I'm sartin he's creepin' round on your side."

Already had the young man turned his eyes in the direction indicated. Fifty yards away the trees were very dense, and almost as Tom concluded his warning, Linwood saw an Indian dodge behind a large sycamore. Taking care that no part of his own person was exposed, he managed to thrust the muzzle of his rifle between a cleft in the rocks, covering the tree behind which his foe had taken shelter.

"Waitin' fur t'other one to come up an' pitch into us from the rear," remarked Tom, after a short pause. "What fools! P'raps they mistrust thar's only *one* hyar. Jes' so. Thet warnin' mout 'a' reached the ears of the one left ter guard you if his skull wurn't out o' gear!"

He had barely finished speaking, when the sharp crack of Linwood's rifle echoed through the forest, instantly followed by the death-shriek of an Indian.

"Jes' so," said the Trailer, coolly, as he turned his head for a moment toward Linwood. "Sorter makes up fur yer blunder in gittin' took awhile ago. Down!" he added, suddenly, as, shooting back his long arm, he grasped his friend's ankle and jerked it back, throwing him forward upon his hands.

Quick as had been this action, however, it was not in time to evade the bullet which grazed Linwood's cheek close enough to draw blood freely. Merely assuring himself that the wound was not serious, Tom sprung to his feet, and uttering a war-cry as terrific as that of any savage, bounded away in pursuit of the Indian beyond the gully, who had taken to his heels. The fellow made good use of his legs, and by the time his pursuer had emerged on the opposite side, was too far away among the trees to be brought down by a shot. Tom pursued, however, till, coming across the deer he had killed, he abandoned the chase and returned, bringing the game upon his shoulder.

Linwood had stanched the bleeding of his wound, and re-loaded his rifle as the Trailer came up.

"Huh!" exclaimed the latter, as he dropped his burden and glanced at his friend's wound. "See hyar! I hope this 'ere 'll be sunthin' of a lesson. Don't never git *sot up* 'cos you happen to git the better of an Injin. Eh," he added, turning over the dead body of the savage. "Hit *squar'* in the breast. Sunthin' of a squaw to show so much of his body ter once."

"I shot him through the tree," said Linwood, who there-upon directed his friend's attention to the sycamore. It was in process of decay, and contained a hollow, into which the Indian had entered. The outside next to Linwood's view was a mere shell, and there were several knot-holes, none of which were over an inch in diameter. Through one of these the savage was looking when Linwood, understanding the situation, fired with the result stated.

The Trailer looked close, and saw that the bullet had left no trace, but had gone straight through the hole, at fifty yards' distance.

"A good shot, youngster," he said. "'Tain't ter be denied. I give ye credit fur it. I've seen them of twice yer expe-
runcie that would be proud on't. But that ain't *it*. You riz
up, a trifle excited over yer work, an' it come nigh costin' ye
yer life. It's all turned out well enough, 'cos it drew the fire
of that other Injum, an' we've got rid of him; but don't never
let a thing like that throw ye out o' gear ag'in."

"Do you intend to let that other fellow go?" asked the
young man.

"Sartin; stret to his tribe," replied Tom. "Ruther he
would than not, fur now they'll know fur sartin how much
Tom Hawk run inter thar debt 'ithin the last four an' twenty
hours."

While thus speaking the hunter had cut off the long hair
of this new victim and appropriated a small box and utensils
of painting which he found upon his person.

"The thing has happened well," he resumed, as he also took
a light fancy blanket which the savage had carried snugly
wrapped about his loins. "These 'ere may prove of service
afore long. Now for the hole in the hill an' sunthin' ter re-
cooperate with."

And again shouldering the deer he set off, followed by Lin-
wood, who had dragged the body of the warrior into the
bushes.

But the breakfast of which both were so eager to partake,
was to be deferred longer than they imagined. They were
within sight of the cave when an incident happened which
seriously threatened Linwood's future plans and prospects.
They caught a glimpse of two white men in the distance,
who they at once knew were from the Ruggles settlement.
Instantly betaking themselves to cover, our friends soon had
the satisfaction of knowing that they were not yet seen. The
two settlers were well armed, and were advancing in a line
that would bring them within ten yards of the one for whom
they were evidently searching.

"'Twon't dew to stir," said Tom, in a whisper. "Mebbe
they'll pass on in their s'arch 'ithout seein' us. If they don't,
remember I'll stand by ye, youngster. That's sed. Pull them
branches over the carkiss a trifle more. Thar. No more is
ter be done now but to wait."

In a short time they heard the settlers drawing near. They even heard their conversation, and Linwood learned that the forest was both to be watched and searched for a number of days till there was reason to think that the murderer of Archibald Ruggles either had perished at the hands of the savages or had fled the region. On came the men till, from his cover, Linwood could see them. They were not of those who had been prominent in his recent arrest. Suddenly a shout was heard in the direction from which he and his friend had just come, and the two settlers bounded past within two yards of where our friends lay. As soon as the men had disappeared Linwood and his preserver sprung to their feet.

"Now for the cave in double airnest," ejaculated Tom. "Thar's half a dozen on the s'arch, and all within call of each other. The discovery of the dead Injuns 'll make it mighty inconvenient for us, but it kain't be helped."

While speaking he had grasped the carcass of the deer, and with all possible dispatch they sought their retreat in the rocks. This was soon gained and they entered, taking pains to block the entrance in such a manner that none would suspect its existence.

"We're in fur it, squar'," said Tom, as soon as every thing was secure. "Hey ter stand *livin'* for a while I consate. Mebbe fur three days, mebbe fur longer. 'Twon't dew fur us ter ventur' nigh the clearin' till things ar' settled. An' thet brings me few a plan I've got fur your gwine boldly amongst the hull crew thar, 'ithout fear of bein' known. We mout as well talk it over now, 'cos thar's no chance fur a fire yit, an' nary one on us keers to eat raw venison jest now."

Leaving them, we will pass over a week and take a view of affairs in the Ruggles settlement.

CHAPTER V.

A WILL.

As the Trailer had predicted, the forest was scoured early and late for three days by squads of the settlers. Both himself and his friend chafed considerably at being obliged to remain secreted, but happily they had enough to subsist upon. They seldom ventured forth except at night, for the plan formed for ferreting out the murderer and bringing him to justice made it necessary for Tom as well Linwood to be thought far away from the region. But at last all excitement in the clearing died away, every one convinced that Linwood was either killed or had fled forever from the scene of his crime.

Black Sam, contrary to former expectation, yet lived, though crippled for life. He had been removed to his own cabin, where his wants were amply provided for by the orders of Carrie.

A week had passed since Linwood's escape, when there was again considerable excitement in the settlement. News came to Carrie that the body of her murdered uncle had been found in the creek and brought to black Sam's cabin. She hurried thither, but refrained from looking at the mutilated form. At first there had been doubts as to its identity, but these were removed when the clothing upon it was recognized as that last worn by old Mr. Ruggles. The body had been found in an obscure eddy of the creek where a pile of drift-wood had stayed its progress down-stream and also screened it from previous discovery when the water was yet high. An old root-doctor, who had strolled into the place three days after the murder, was the first to discover it while looking for some particular roots and herbs along the banks of the stream. The same day it was buried from sight, in the presence of a sorrowing people.

Besides Carrie, there was another person present who betrayed singular emotions when the body of her uncle was identified. This was Dorlon Searle. To a close observer, his

would seem rather the emotions of guilt than of sorrow. He did not so much as look at the body, but kept at the outer edge of the crowd, with a restless expression in his black eyes. There *was* at least *one* close observer of Searle's every motion; one who, without appearing to do so, noted every shade of expression in his eye and countenance. This one was Bill Ennis. Though fully impressed with an idea of Linwood's guilt, he felt that the latter had tried to reveal something in regard to Searle, just before the alarm of Indians came, resulting in Linwood's escape. What that something might be was only conjecture; but Ennis resolved to keep silent about it and watch the conduct of Searle.

More notice of the last named seems necessary here. As we have said, he acted as secretary to Carrie's uncle even before Linwood came to the settlement. He was of genteel address, good-looking, modest in his deportment, and seemed anxious to ingratiate himself into the good graces of everybody. He professed to have been a teacher in some distant city, and that failing health had induced him to seek some new settlement, where his duties might be less confining and more congenial. If the power to please is an art, Searle had acquired it to perfection. Archibald Ruggles had been prepossessed in his favor from the first, and so were the settlers generally. Carrie Ellingham was pleased with his society to a certain extent; but, though hardly conscious herself of the fact, there was something in the general appearance of Searle which did not impress her favorably. And this "something" became more apparent to her upon the advent of Linwood, thus enabling her to judge by contrast. The latter was not so handsome in person, nor polished in manner as Searle; but Carrie detected an expression more frank in Linwood's countenance and a certain independence of thought and action, which really influenced her in his favor. These two young men, possible rivals, seemed to be held in equal respect by all till the time of the late sad tragedy.

On the morning succeeding the funeral of her uncle, Dorlon Searle sought Carrie in the drawing-room. In a delicate manner he broached the subject of business affairs with which she was identified. It was well known that her uncle had executed a will, and it seemed fit that the will should now be

read and proved by the witnesses--certain prominent men of the settlement. The papers of her uncle were kept in an oaken desk, the key of which could not be found upon his person when recovered from the water. It was therefore necessary to break the lock. At the suggestion of Searle, Carrie sent a negro servant to summon the witnesses to be present.

While the servant was gone, they conversed freely upon late affairs. Never before had Dorlon Searle appeared to such advantage in the eyes of Carrie. She began to think she had not appreciated him. He acted the part of an earnest, sympathizing friend. He spoke in eloquent terms of her deceased uncle, of his deep respect for him, dwelling upon his many virtues, and deplored his untimely fate. Looks, words and tones were in skillful unison, and were not without effect upon the artless girl, who had loved and reverenced her uncle. But when Searle expressed regrets that his friend Linwood had been the victim of circumstances, and began to speculate vaguely as to who the real murderer could have been, Carrie was greatly surprised. She viewed the secretary in a new light. He then, despite the almost damning evidence against Linwood, could not believe in the latter's guilt! She felt glad that she was not alone in that belief. But, she made no confidant of Searle in regard to her secret agency in Linwood's escape.

Among the books lying upon the table near them, was one brought from her uncle's room, where it had been found outside his desk. Carrie never had examined it. Searle, as if by accident, placed his hand upon it and in an interval of the conversation opened it. It was a private memorandum-book used by Ruggles. Searle discovered its character, and was about to pass it to Carrie, when suddenly his eye seemed riveted upon a paragraph, and he could not refrain from reading it. His color changed while doing so, and he cast a troubled look upon Carrie.

"What is it you have found?" she exclaimed, anxiously.
"I have never looked into that book."

"I could wish that I never had," said Searle. "Good heaven, it seems hard to believe even now; and yet--*that paragraph!*"

She took the book from his hand and read what he indicated. Well might Carrie's cheek blanch. The following, in the well-known handwriting of her uncle—the last entry he had ever made.

"A strange gloom is upon my spirits this evening. It seems like what some would call a presentiment of evil. Pshaw! I'm getting old and nervous. The impending storm has something to do with it probably. Whom should *I* fear? Not Frederick Linwood, surely. True, I questioned him closely about the rumor, for it places Carrie in a somewhat ridiculous light, even among the not over-sensitive settlers. He denies it, and perhaps he did not so boast. It was in poor taste for him to ask for Carrie's hand at such a time, though. Well, perhaps I *did* refuse him somewhat harshly. He should not have threatened me for it, though. Perhaps he is already sorry for his words. They betrayed more malice than I could have believed him capable of. I must dispel this gloom. Let's see. I will call upon old Sam. The walk there and back will do me good."

Carrie could not disbelieve the evidence of her senses. That this had been written by her uncle she could not doubt. She experienced a terrible revulsion of feeling. She became as for the first time conscious of how much she had been attached to Linwood. It was a bitter reflection that she had almost loved him who had murdered her uncle. She tried to combat even this new evidence of guilt. The eyes of Searle were upon her with an eager, anxious expression. But when she looked up she saw only in his face the shocked look one might wear upon discovering the perfidy of a trusted friend.

"And yet, despite all this, he may still be innocent," suggested Searle.

"I fear not, Mr. Searle," said Carrie, sorrowfully. "If it were not for this note in my uncle's own handwriting—and then, Linwood denied the threat! You overheard it too, did you not?"

"Yes. Linwood was hasty. Still I can hardly believe—but—ah—it is a hard thing, Miss Eslingham."

"Tell me, Mr. Searle, can you yet entertain a single doubt of his guilt?" said Carrie, almost imploringly.

There was a short pause, Scarle meanwhile leaning his forehead upon his hands. Then rousing up he shook his head slowly. "No, Miss Ellingham, I can not. Five minutes ago I could; but now it is simply impossible."

He rose, excused himself, and begging her to apprise him when the men came, left the room.

An hour later the negro Mose returned. The men would come in the afternoon. Carrie dismissed him, and passed out herself into the hall on the way to her private room. Hearing an altercation in the yard, she stepped to the door and looked out. Mose was endeavoring to oppose the progress of the root-doctor, who seemed determined to enter the house.

"G'long 'way, you, Doctor Bag!" said Mose, authoritatively. "No one isn't sick here, tell yer. When dey is dey'll let yer know ef dey want a bag o' dirty roots ter cure 'em. Can't gum me! Don't b'f'eve Misce Carrie sent fur ye—not a bit. Jis' make yerse'f sea'ce. I *b'long* here, I does."

A queer-looking specimen was the doctor, an old man, with shuffling gait, dressed more like an Indian than a white, and, judging by his color, only a half-breed at best. He carried a bag, slung over his shoulder, filled with roots and herbs of various kinds. He seldom spoke, except when addressed, and his general appearance was so ludicrous that he became the subject of many witticisms. The name, "Dr. Bag," was given him by common consent—a fact which seemed not to disturb his equanimity in the least. But, despite his recent advent and grotesque appearance, he began to be regarded with some consideration, for he had shown considerable skill in "doctoring" the few who were sick. This, coming to Carrie's ears, she had expressed a wish to see him, and here he was.

"Stand aside, Mose, and let the doctor come in," said Carrie. "My head feels badly this morning and maybe the doctor can help me."

The negro obeyed reluctantly, casting a look of disgust upon the shabby-looking doctor, as he allowed him to pass in. The latter glanced keenly at Carrie, and then without speaking, began to select a few herbs from his bag. She watched him curiously and asked him a few questions; but he seemed too busy for reply except when the questions were in regard

to the medical properties of his roots and herbs. Then he answered in the short, guttural style peculiar to an Indian. In a short time he finished his selection and gave it to Carrie with directions for use. She offered him money, but he shook his head.

"Don't care for the coin," he said; "can't eat that. Been out in the woods, and feel hungry some. Give me something to eat."

Carrie led him to the kitchen, directing the servants to prepare him a plentiful lunch. While eating, he both watched and listened. Mose came round, and after poking fun at the "sumptuous" doctor, began to talk of his late master's will, to be proved that afternoon. The doctor's eyes gleamed with curiosity; but it occasioned no surprise when he abruptly concluded his meal and left the house.

It was quite late in the afternoon when the men came who were to witness the reading and the opening of the will. Bill Ennis and Gates were among the number. Carrie and Dorlon Searle led the way to the room of Archibald Ruggles. In presence of all, Searle broke open the desk, where he found many papers, among them the will, which he proceeded to read in a distinct voice. As he unrolled the parchment upon which it was written, a folded paper fell out, diverting his attention for a moment. He picked the paper up, and then finished his reading of the will. As had been generally surmised, every thing the old gentleman possessed was bequeathed to "My dutiful and affectionate niece, Carrie Effingham." This occasioned no surprise, as it was understood that he had no other legal heir. The witnesses present acknowledged their signatures to the instrument, and the business seemed ended.

Searle opened the paper which had dropped from the will, glanced over it for a moment, and was about to place it in his pocket, when Bill Ennis interposed.

"What's that, Mr. S'arl', if ye please? I seen it drop out from the will ye've jest read. Bein' thar, mebbe we, as witnesses, orter know what 'tis." Ennis spoke sharply.

"I beg your forbearance for a moment, gentlemen," said Searle, in an embarrassed tone. "True, this paper dropped from the will. It *contains but little reference to it, however.* It was written by Archibald Ruggles, and contains a suggestion

in regard to two persons. It was conceived in kindness, but—would place those persons in—in—an awkward position. There are many other papers here, as you see, relating, doubtless, to business matters. We will examine them together, if Miss Ellingham wishes us to do so. But, gentlemen, I ask you, I ask Miss Ellingham, to allow me to destroy this paper, here and now."

"'Twon't 'dew," said Bill Ennis, promptly. "'Twouldn't look well. Archibald Ruggles *knewed* us, I reckon. Read it out, or gin it to one of us."

His companions exchanged looks, and seconded Bill's demand.

"I appeal to you, Miss Ellingham," said the embarrassed secretary.

"It seems perfectly proper to me that it should be read," she said. "My uncle has written nothing there unworthy of himself."

"Far be it from me to insinuate that he has," replied Searle. "Only—well, I, of course, can have no voice in the matter. But please excuse me—here, Mr. Ennis, will you read it?"

Bill took the paper, but reading not being in his line of accomplishments, he passed it to one of his companions, who read it aloud. It was addressed as follows:

"To whom it may concern:

"It will be seen that I, Archibald Ruggles, have bequeathed my entire property to my beloved niece Carrie. I have made no exactions from her, I shall make none now, having faith in her good judgment, and in her disposition to do good as she has opportunity, with the great means at her disposal. I may be called away suddenly; at times I have a presentiment that this will be the case. I could wish, ere I die, to see her settled in life with a husband worthy of her—one on whom she could lean with perfect trust, whom adversity could only make more devoted and constant. Having no wish to influence her in the least against her will, and yet feeling a paternal interest in her welfare, I here express the hope that she may form an alliance with my trusted secretary, Dorton Searle, who, I feel assured, entertains the most honorable love for her, and who, also, as I firmly believe, combines with business capabilities, those generous instincts which I should wish to see in the husband of my dear niece. Perhaps these suggestions may never be read by other eyes save my own; but if otherwise, then they are only to be considered as suggestions, the scope of which time or circumstances may justly modify."

To say that this produced a sensation among the listeners would be useless. It was in the handwriting of Archibald Ruggles, and could not be mistaken. Neither could be the magnanimity and delicacy of Dorlon Searle. The honest-hearted Bill Ennis "took back" all his former distrust in regard to the latter, and Carrie more than ever believed that she had failed to appreciate the man in whom her uncle had reposed so much confidence. She turned and passed from the room, while Ennis grasped Searle by the hand.

"Beg pardin', Mr. S'arl," he said, warmly, "I understand ye now—we all do. 'Twas right enuff hevin' it read. 'Tain't done ye no' hurt, nuther."

Searle dropped his eyes modestly, but before he could reply, an exclamation of surprise from Carrie, who had gone down below, reached his ears. He hurried out, and descended the stairs, closely followed by his companions.

CHAPTER VI.

ON TRAIL.

The cause of Carrie's surprise was a tall, ungainly man, who had entered from without just as she reached the foot of the stairs. He wore a hunter costume, of the rudest description, and held his rifle by the muzzle, resting the stock upon the floor. There was but slight covering upon his head, except a mass of hair long as an Indian's; a scant beard and a heavy brow, under which gleamed bright gray eyes. His features were uncouth in the extreme, and with an expression in his face of droll humor was also one of great firmness and will-power. Just behind him stood an Indian, also with a rifle, but whose face was partly concealed by a rough bandage. Evidently wounded about the forehead or temple.

"Don't be skeert, gal," said the tall hunter, before Carrie or her friends could speak. "Rough lookin' I be, but not a mite dangerous ter seech as you. Don't understand sirimony; never

could. "What 'he ye dewin' hyar—you?" indicating Gates. "Forgot my profile, hev ye? Orter know it, I consate."

As it happened, Gates was the only one among the three or four men there who knew the hunter personally, although not a man, woman or child along the border but knew him either by sight or reputation.

"Trailer Tom, by the Eternals!" said Gates, stepping forward.

"Jes' so. Thought ye'd know me. Boarded out with me awhile once, didn't ye? Give us yer grupper."

The two shook hands.

"Glad ter see ye, Tom," Gates said, releasing his hand from the other's grasp as soon as possible. "Ye hain't b'en in these parts fur some time. Who've ye got hyar with ye?"

"An Injun; a scare-crow; any thing ye're a mind ter call 'im. Of the Mohawk breed, I consate. I've tuk 'im ter bring up. Stole 'im from his enemies, thet war goin' ter make a fire on 'im. Don't know no tribe but me sence, Jumper don't. Thet's what I've christened 'im. He *kin* jump. He'd kill hisself fur me, he would. Like ter done it, with an arrer thet broke the string an' hit 'im nigh his left look-out. See hyar!"

While communicating this string of information, the hunter, either by accident or design, had shielded, as much as possible, the form of his companion, upon whom considerable attention had been directed. Tom's last exclamation, so abrupt, was followed by a moment's silence, drawing all attention again on himself.

"I've hearn siv'ral things, I hev," he resumed. "Stopped at a settler's house a mile or two from hyar—Welch—ye mout know 'im. Put me up ter what happined hyarabouts a week gone. Knowed Arch'buld Ruggles once. 'Twas siv'ral years agone, when Injun scrimmages was 's thick 's bushes. I'd b'en on a bender 'mong the reds. Got cut an' slashed some. Hed run the gantlet of tew or three tribes, an' it made me pump wind ruther uncommon. Wa'n't enough on't left in my amatermy ter blow a muskeeter off his hind-legs. Mighty, no! He tuk me in; gin me a chance to r'cooperate. Wa'n't here then, *you*," nodding toward Carrie. "Wal, he war like a father ter me, though I never knowed one. A hull man

clean through. What next? Got murdered! An' arter nabbin' the p'ison human what done it, *you*, Gates, an' amongst ye, Iowed 'im ter gin ye the slip! May I be slashed ef't don't rile me ter think on't! Orter managed better 'n that—you, Gates. Spilt, I consate. Nothin' but a boy now. That's *sed!*"

All gazed curiously upon the strange man, Searle with secret uneasiness. Somehow he quailed when his eyes met those of the hunter, as they occasionally did. It seemed as though they could read his very soul. Carrie Ellingham felt her heart warming toward this man, who, a moment before, had so startled her.

The last words of the Trailer rankled in the mind of Gates. The term "boy" was as disparaging to a border-man as the word "squaw" to an Indian. Thus used, it was often the introduction to a fight upon the spot. But Gates knew the foolishness of a quarrel with the man before him. A boy indeed he would have been in his hands.

"Hard on us, you be," Gates said. "We mout hev b'en keerless. 'Twa'n't so strange we war, when the Injuns pounced so sudden onter the clearin'. I allow that no man sot more by Arch'buld Ruggles, or war more bent on stringin' up his murderer, nor I was. Fact was, we missed it in not stringin' 'im up jest arter we fust nabbed 'im. I allow 'twas my mind ter dew it, but I was overruled."

He glanced toward Bill Ennis, significantly.

"I don't deny that I opposed it then," said the latter. "Most on us did, 'cept you, Tom Gates. The cuss wanted time, an' a Christian hearin'. I kain't see 'twas wrong ter grant it. Ef thar was keerlessness, it come arterwards."

"*Hearin'?*" retorted Gates, contemptuously. "Thar wa'n't need on't. The everdunce wes plain as daylight ag'in' 'im, an' I said so. Wa'n't it *proced* so? You war squeamish, Bill. Ye Iowed yerself ter gin back 'cos the villain made sech pertensions of innocence. A man never orter let his feelin's rule ag'in' reason."

"Feelin's, Tom?" said Bill Ennis, tartly. "'Twa'n't it. I ain't sech a weak-head as that. *You* gin way to feelin's more'n I did, I tell ye squar'."

"Me! Me gin way ter feelin's? Not b' a durned sight!"

"Yes, you," persisted Bill, beginning to show his choler at the other's air of superiority. "'Twas nat'ral ye sh'd, arter ye'd got that sidewinder from Linwood. The cuss *did* hit hard, you'll allow. 'Pear'd 's 'o' ye'd 'a' hung 'im fur that jest then, which wouldn't 'a' b'en right."

Gates glared angrily on his rival as he saw the smile that went around at this rejoinder. The Indian stood without betraying emotions of any kind, though not a word or look of the men escaped him.

"Ef that ar' 's meant fur an insult, Bill Ennis, jestoller me ou' door whar thar's elbow-room?" Gates said, but his first movement toward leaving the room was interrupted by Trailer Tom.

"See hyar! Don't go out *now*, ary one on ye. Don't bile over. Don't cut an' slash over trifles. Don't gouge eyes or punch noses 'cos I've come. I was sot on comin' hyar, partwise 'cos I wanted ter see Arch'buld Ruggles ag'in, partwise on Jumper's account, who needs a little civilized nussin'. I'd b'en glad ter seen 'im. Mighty, yes. '*Twas* a durned sh—*overlook*—the p'ison murderer 's gittin' off though. Every thing squar' ag'in' 'im ef what Welch said is true."

"Jest why I wanted ter string 'im up at fust," persisted Gates, glancing spitefully toward Ennis.

"Our friend is right, men," said Searle. "Don't argue the matter of blame. Let it drop, and be friends. It's a great pity the murderer escaped. But, I presume the hunter does not question our intentions or motives."

"Jes' so, mister," said Tom Hawk, glancing approvingly at Searle. "*I don't. Ye've told it squar'?*"

"I confess to having had doubts myself, at first, of Linwood's guilt," continued Searle. "Not that the circumstances weren't against him, but it was hard to believe one guilty whom I thought so generous and noble. — But since his escape —even to-day—we have discovered that which, if possible, more than confirms his guilt."

Both Gates and Ennis forgot their enmity at hearing this announcement. All present showed their surprise except Carrie, who knew what Searle meant.

"With your permission, Miss Ellingham, I will ask the men into the drawing-room, where they can see what I have re-

ferred to," said Searle. Carrie assented, and led the way thither. The paragraph in the memorandum-book was shown and recognized as the well-known hand-writing of Archibald Ruggles. The Indian also managed to obtain a view of the writing, but none of the rest noticed him. He gave a slight start, but it was a momentary one, and he eagerly scanned the faces of Searle and Carrie, when he could do so without being remarked.

"Good mighty!" exclaimed the Trailer, as the paragraph was read. "This, as ye say, Mister S'arl', confirms t'other looks—*everdunce*, as ye call it—ag'in' the onhumin raskil. T'other was—le's see: a knife an' some sort o' shirt gearin'—Welch sed 'twas ter be seen here."

These articles had been indeed kept, and Searle, willing to gratify the hunter's curiosity, brought forth the knife and the fragment of a shirt-bosom on which were blood-prints. These were examined curiously by Hawk, who accompanied Searle's explanations with remarks quaint and characteristic. The latter seemed to have lost the vague uneasiness he had felt on first beholding the renowned hunter, who, in turn, had begun to evince considerable respect for Searle. And certainly the secretary seemed anxious to make a good impression on the noted backwoodsman.

"Jes' so!" said the latter, as he laid down the evidences of Linwood's guilt. "Thar kain't be any thing plainer. We'll foller up this trail, we will. Jest as soon as Jumper gits better, which 'll be in less than three days. Thet's *sed!*!"

All gazed upon him in surprise. The idea of yet retaking Linwood seemed absurd. It was supposed that he had fled into remote wilds, there to lead a renegade life, or at best to assume another name and affiliate with men who would never suspect his infamous career.

"Don't look as 'ough 'twere *onpossible*," continued the hunter with emphasis, as he saw that attention was being given toward the Indian. "Mebbe the cuss hez got took afore this time an' roasted by the Injuns. If he *hez* I'm gwine ter know it. Ef he hain't I'll foller 'im like a shadder. J'ined some of the hostile reds, likely. Don't make no difference 'cept in the manner of his death. I don't ingage ter bring 'im back hyar, but I *dew* ingage ter bring news of his death,

ither by the reds themselves or by this shutin'-iron in my hand I kin *doe* it. It's in the line of my perfeshun. That's *sez*!"

"If the thing is possible you are the man above all others to do it," said Searle. "And yet I could almost hope the poor wretch would finally escape if there were hopes of his sincerely repenting. Still it may be wrong to wish so in view of the enormity of the crime. The example of his fate should not be lost either?"

"Jes' so. Ye ar' right," said Tom. "It *sha'n't be*, muther. I kin foller a trail, I kin, sivul kinds on 'em. It's my per-feshun, my *force*, as the Frenchers say. Come, Jumper, we must go," he added, turning toward the Indian.

Both turned abruptly toward the door, when Gates spoke.

"Whar, Tom? Hold on. Thar's no need o' campin' in the woods while ye're hyar. Jist gin me a chance an' I'll ax yer. Come ter my cabin. Tain't more 'n three miles away."

"I claim precedence," said Carrie, with a sad smile. "Think not, brave hunter, that I am less hospitable than my poor uncle would have been. Stay here as long as you like. Your friend the Indian needs care. He shall have it here."

Tom paused. It was beginning to grow dark in the room.

Gates and Ennis were the only ones remaining of those who had been summoned there on business. Searle warmly seconded Carrie's proposal.

"Rough ones, we be," replied the hunter. "'Tain't many thet 'ud keer ter keep us. I counted on comin' in the mornin' ag'in. Fur a fresh bandage mebbe, an' sunthin' warm for Jumper. Nary one on us is used ter roofs. Mout be better. What say, Jumper?"

"Git leaf-med'cine first in woods," said the Indian, in the peculiar guttural tone of his class, pointing as he spoke, without. "Den rest--where you go, me go. Good."

"Jes' so. Needs some fresh leaves to-night. Stroll your way to-morrer Gates, mebbe. We'll put up with ye, gal. Tuck us away anywhar. Be in soon's Jumper hyar finds what he wants."

"There's a root-doctor who would save you the trouble of looking if he were here," said Carrie. "He afforded me relief this morning. There's some one coming toward the house now. I think it is the old doctor himself."

Tom and his Indian companion exchanged a quick glance, unobserved by the others present.

"Then we'll meet 'im an' see what he's got," said the Trailer, promptly. "If it's what Jumper wants, an' is *fresh*, so ; if not, we'll peradade the old chap ter help us find it afore it's tew dark."

And with these words Tom and his "Injun" left the house, going to meet the doctor. Gates and Ennis exchanged a few words, shook hands, and also set off for their respective homes. Carrie remained looking after Trailer Tom and the Indian. She saw them meet the old root-doctor, who seemed somewhat startled at the meeting. They held a short conference. Dr. Bag, as he was called, drew forth from his medicine-pouch, plants which the Indian examined and then shook his head. Whereupon the trio turned about, and were soon lost to view in the increasing gloom.

Carrie Ellingham turned from the window. Behind her stood Searle, who had also watched the departure of the men. It was so dusky in the room now, that neither one could see the other's face distinctly. Notwithstanding, Carrie felt somewhat embarrassed. It had been an eventful day in her heart-experience, a sad awakening from what might have been to the stern realities lately revealed. Linwood, whom she had really loved with the fresh earnestness of her virgin heart ; in whom she had unconsciously centered her beau ideal of noble, independent manhood, now lay a wreck, depraved, heaven-cursed ! Struggling with all her power against the idea of his guilt, in face of the circumstances against him ; strengthened by a love in her heart and by his earnest words when he fled after being saved by her hands ! And in the midst of such struggling and hope, came additional evidence, as from the very grave of her murdered uncle, bidding her struggle no more, hope no more. Telling her beyond all cavil that her sometime idol had fallen hopelessly and forever ! And here beside her stood a young man, handsome in person, respectful in manner, the trusted secretary of her uncle ; one who shared her hopes that Linwood was innocent, and only became convinced to the contrary by that which also convinced her while it gave her that terrible soul-shock. One whom her uncle had secretly wished to see the betrothed of his niece, whose char-

acter that very day had appeared as much more noble, magnanimous and exalted, as Linwood's had been revealed the very opposite of these qualities. One who, could he have done so, would have left the secret of her uncle's wishes, so far as he himself was concerned, unrevealed forever, unless he could, without the aid of those expressed wishes, have won her love! Such a view and belief was Carrie's.

"A strange couple, that," said Searle, after a moment's silence. "The hunter is a pure diamond, though in the rough. It is something to see a man of his reputation. I think his project of bringing poor Linwood to justice will prove vain, however."

Carrie started. Could it be that Searle divined her cherished heart secret, and was magnanimous enough to sympathize with her grief on that account?

"Here is the key to your uncle's room, Miss Ellingham," continued Searle, calmly. "The door is locked, and the contents of the desk will be safe until such time as you may choose to examine them further."

He left her, and Carrie remained alone for some time, absorbed in deep thought. Then she directed a servant, who came with a light, to conduct Tom and his friend, when they should come, to a room which she designated.

The last-named persons did not go far with the root-doctor. As soon as the trio were concealed by the gloom they stopped short.

"Good mighty!" was the first exclamation of Tom, as he placed his hand upon the shoulder of the supposed Indian. "Things *dew* look squar' ag'in' ye, youngster! An' not only squar', but double-clinched!"

"I admit it; I told you as much in the start," said the disguised Linwood. "I'm afraid what you have heard and seen has proved too much for your faith in my innocence. You had a good view of Searle. What do you think of him?"

"He's got one of the softest, *pared-down* looks, I ever seen a raskil wear. Mebbe it's 'cos I mistrust 'im. Think I sh'u'd 'a' done it if I hedn't heerd *your* story. Ef he *ain't* a vill'in, I'm gre'tly mystersied over that murder. 'Cos I don't b'lieve 'twas you. I *kain't*. Thet's *sed*, fur once, an' ag'in."

"Thank you, Tom. The end is not yet. Did you notice the uneasy expression in his face when you first met in the hall?"

"B' shore I did. Threw jest a little lightnin' inter that look, I did. He quailed afore it. Hed ter be keerful how I looked arter that, fur fear he'd git s'picious. I hed ter be keerful of ye too, but ye passed well. They don't mistrust ye, an' that's *one p'int* gained. But look a hyar! 'D ye see that writin'? 'D ye hear it read? An' the knife ye say yerself was your'n as well as the shirt-gear. How's them ter be got 'round? It's a diffikilt trail ter foller, or ruther no trail at all. Every thin' 'pears to be kivered up."

"Not so bad as that," said Linwood, quietly. "I think they had just finished an examination of the will as we got there. That is, if our friend, here, heard right this morning?"

This form of the question was addressed to the root-doctor, who stood by, looking at them askance. The Trailer and Linwood had suddenly encountered Dr. Bag the day before, while secretly watching the mansion premises. Two alternatives were before them. Either to take him prisoner, or to make him their confidant; for though a new-comer into the place, they knew he must have heard the particulars of the late murder, and might spoil their plans if allowed to pass unquestioned. If the first course was adopted, the doctor's sudden disappearance might arouse suspicion. If the latter, he might prove a valuable help in their secret investigations. They adopted the latter alternative, after becoming satisfied that the "old sachim," as Tom called him, would not play them false.

"I'm sure I did," he said. "'Twar in the kitchen-room. The nigs talked what I told ye. Heerd it stret while eatin' what the girl told 'em ter give me. A good girl—good looks."

"Jes' so, sachim. My mind. As purty a one, tew, as iver wore a gown. Ain't beyond jedgin' of that—you an' me—if we *dew* look like the devil ourselves, be we? But, of what consarn 's the *will*, s'posin' ye'd heerd it?" continued Hawk, turning toward Linwood.

"Nothing—perhaps," said the latter, thoughtfully. "No; it would have added nothing to what I have already learned.

Archibald Ruggles never wrote that paragraph found in his memorandum-book! Searle did it. He's a clever penman, and his imitation of the handwriting is so near perfect, that no one, unless suspecting him, would detect the forgery. I did."

"May I be slashed!" said Tom. "It mout be. The tail-end of what was fixed up aforehand, likely. Thet is, ef ye're *sure*."

"I'll tell you *why* I am sure. Because I never asked Mr. Ruggles for his niece's hand; because we never quarreled, and I never threatened him."

"I b'l'eve ye ag'in," said the hunter, earnestly. "But, what of thet? *B'l'erin'* is one thing, *provin'* another. When sunthin' is sound ye k'n put yer finger on, sunthin' thet'll *prove itself* ag'in' S'arl', then ye'll stan' a chance. *One* sich a trail mout lead ter sivnul. The fust ain't found yit. Gittin' late, tew. 'Twon't dew ter stay long hyar. We must git back! Come, Jumper, it's gittin' late; hirrup a trifle! We're 'mongst civerlized folks now, r'member. We're gwine ter camp under a roof of boards, instid of limbs. With them thet keep us, I don't allow we orter keep 'em waitin' long. We'll fix the yarbs arter we git ter roost. An' you, old sachim, you've done squar' an' thet's sayin' enuff. Comin' with us, eh? Jest as ye consate. Huh! Who's thar?"

CHAPTER VII

A MIDNIGHT SEARCH.

Previous to this sudden turn in their conversation the three men had spoken in tones which could not have been heard ten yards away. As the Trailer addressed the disguised Linwood by his assumed name, the latter at once knew that some one was approaching, and governed himself accordingly. The root-doctor, understanding that he was to follow, did so, and all three turned back while Tom kept up his jargon with the supposed Indian. A half-dozen rods further, and an ex-

proaching form loomed up out of the dusky twilight, eliciting the last-mentioned query from Tom Hawk.

"Eh, Mr. S'arl?" continued Tom, as the other came near. "Walkin' out for a breathe, I consate? Jes' so. House-kiverin' 's well 'nuff at sartin times. Tew much on't ain't good. Makes a man's lungs narrer. Thar 's Tom Gates thet used ter board out with me. Hain't the same man sence he took ter cabin-livin', Tom ain't."

"I believe you, my friend," said Searle. "I have been ill lately, but have given attention to business affairs, thus keeping me confined too much. I am going to spend more time out, and this evening air is refreshing."

"Sartin. I see. Thought ye'd meet us, an' stroll back with us. Jes' so. See hyar. Kain't say *squar'* thet I don't b'Peve in houses. Good 'nough ter recoopereate in. *That*, an' for storin' pervisions an' traps mostly. But fur sleepin'—gin me whar a man kin hev elbow-room fur his breathin' belluses. Thet's my consate. But fur sartin ails civilized nussin' is best, even for an Injun. A hurt eye ain't triflin'; mighty, no. Hirrup, Jumper. Don't lag. "Tain't for sech as you 'n' me ter keep folks waitin'."

"It isn't late; you'll be in time," Searle said, apparently interested in Dave's humor. "Miss Essingham has a room prepared for you."

"Eh? Thet's the *gal* ye mean," said Dave. "A ginoine woman, *she* is! Purty, tew. Purvided for, I reckon, 'cos she wur the old man's relation. Feels bad. Looks as 'ough ready ter cry whenever her uncle's name is spoke. Mighty! Could 'a' bellered myself at fust ef 't wa'n't sich work ter wring my profile down tew it. Hev ter dew all sich work inside. *You*, thar, Dr. Yaller-Face? Gwine on another trail? Jes' so. More sick ones, p'raps?"

This abrupt remark was addressed to the root-doctor, who had turned aside as they neared the door of the mansion.

"When he stays about here he sleeps in the barn yonder," explained Searle. "He seems to ignore close shelter as much as yourself."

"Jes' so. A dried-up critter. He's a good eye for yarbs, I reckon. Leastwise he seemed ter know jest what we wanted

an' whar ter find it. L'arnt his perfesshun 'mong the reds, mebbe."

"I think so," said Searle. "He only came into the place three or four days ago. He is not very communicative. It was he who discovered the remains of the lamented Ruggles."

"Thet's what Welch sed. Thought 't wur the one as soon as the gal p'inted 'im out."

By this time they were at the door, and passed in. A servant met them and invited them into the dining-room to partake of food. But Tom declined.

"We lost our appetites down to Welch's cabin," he said. "Most we want jest now is ter lop down. One place is good 's another, only on Jumper's account, p'r'aps house-kiverin's best till the inflermation cools down in his eye."

The servant, agreeably to Carrie's orders, conducted them to a room in the rear part of the house, up-stairs. The moment they entered it, the supposed Indian stretched himself upon the floor, paying no attention to the couch standing in a corner.

"Lay thar then, durn ye! Ye're an Injun all over, sick or well," grunted Tom. "Any *human* bein', now, would nat'rully prefar sunthin' soft, leavin' sech an eye ter keer fur. Try the bed fur once more, I will. Hirrup a little, till I fix these leaves on yer eye. Turn over towards the wall. Thar."

The servant taking it for granted that they required the light, set it upon the floor and left the room, after gazing curiously upon the suffering Indian.

The latter sprung lightly to his feet the moment that the footsteps of the servant and Searle ceased to echo on the stairs. For the latter individual had glided up after them, and had stood just without their door, furtively watching them. He doubtless supposed they were unaware of his proximity, but he was mistaken.

"Tom, do you think Searle suspects?" were Linwood's first words, as he removed the bandage from his head.

"No; he didn't afore dark, an' what he's seen hyar don't count. I've kept 'im from mistrustin', I consate. 'Sides, yer Injun toggery fits, an' yer gait is nigh enuff parfict."

"I hope so; but, what made him follow us up?"

"Thar! that's it. 'Cos he's *guilty*. We're strangers; an' though he moutn't see any thing suspicious 'bout us, our comin' sets 'im thinkin', an' he's bound ter keep watch on us--the way of them that's guilty. Good mighty, yes."

"He must have had *some* object in following us out yonder."

"That's what's b'en bilin' in my head ever sence. What 'was—that's the p'int. Mebbe one thing, mebbe another. What are ye up tew?"

Linwood was examining the room.

"The very one I occupied," he said, in a whisper. "See, here is my chest," and as he spoke he opened it, and began to examine its contents. "Every thing has been examined, but nothing is missing. It was done after the murder. They had to break it open, but had only their labor for their spoils. It's as I told you. Searle found the shirt where I had left it *out* of my chest. Fortunately, I had the key, or he would have donned an entire suit of mine in which to commit the murder!"

"The shirt was enuff fur his plan, it 'pears," said the hunter, gravely. "Mighty, yes! Then thar's the nigger's sw'arin' tew yer voice! Things *hez* a hard look ag'in' ye, youngster. Thar's no gittin' round it nor over it."

"No; but I'll fight it out to the end--either to victory or death. The negro did not mean wrong. He no doubt feels convinced it was my voice he heard. Searle might have imitated *that* as well as forge the presentment found in the memorandum-book. *That* was executed to counteract any thing that might possibly spring up in the minds of the settlers concerning my innocence. How well the wretch planned."

"That writin' was fur the gal's benefit. Jes' so. 'Peared you an' the old man were in the way of his gittin' the gal, eh?"

"There is no other theory. Yes, with us removed, he hoped to win Carrie, and with her the wealth of her uncle, and he no doubt saw that otherwise his chance of doing so was extremely small. Oh, the bloody scoundrel! How much comes to me now of his modest, plausible looks, concealing the devil within."

"Jes' so," said the hunter. "That is, *I* don't doubt that

things is as ye say. But, the p'int is ter *prove* sunthin'. Till ye dew this, *thery* bizness won't count. Mighty, no!"

"I understand that, only too well. Wait a moment."

Their door was slightly ajar. Linwood closed it softly. They of course conversed in low whispers, but the young man did not mean to omit any precautions.

"Don't dew that," said his friend. "Leave it a trifle open. We needn't be so afraid of *bein'* overheerd as to not *over-hear*."

"I'll arrange that," said Linwood.

He placed a chair beside the door, and standing upon it, opened a small panel placed above the door-casing for the purpose of affording light and ventilation. Then he placed himself beside his friend.

"I have *discovered* enough, but as you say, lack proof, which is the essential thing," he said. "That we must wait for and watch for. The situation is favorable for doing so, if, as you seem to think, we are not suspected. If we can not find proof against that rascal, there is one thing left me."

"And that?" said his friend, curiously.

"To reveal myself, and state every thing as I have to you. I had not the chance before. I was tried by storm, and would have been executed by storm had it not been for the prompt action of that angel of mercy, Carrie Essingham. I think I would stand a better chance now; they would listen with passions cooled; they would give me more of a chance."

"They mout—jest as I'm givin' ye. But, would *that* amount to proof?"

"I think, for instance, that I could convince them that what purports to be the "presentment" in the memorandum-book is a forgery, executed by Dorlon Searle."

"How could ye dew it?" said his friend. "Ye got a fair glimpse of that air writin'. See hyar: ef ye hadn't suspected S'arl', could ye hav b'en *sartin* 'twain't ginoine?"

"Can't say as I could," replied Linwood, after a pause. "I can only hope to turn suspicion against Searle by the trial."

"Ye mout dew it, youngster, but the chance ain't fair. He seems to hav kivered all *his* tracks. Thar's nothin' ag'in' 'im thet kin be showed, but every thing ag'in' *you*."

"The very fact of my voluntary appearance, and demand

for another hearing, ought to arouse some faith in my innocence."

"Jes' so. I don't say it moutn't, nor I don't say how long 'twould last. If ye could put yer finger on suthin' squar' ag'in' 'im ter start with, ye'd stand a chance. Otherwise ye'a be in the same box ye wur at first. Nothin' could save yo then I say it *squar!*"

"Do you, even, really have full faith in my innocence, then?" asked the young man, gloomily.

"I *dew!*" replied the hunter; "thet's *sed.* See hyar: this S'arl' crept into the conference of Ruggles, an' through him to that of all the rest. They kain't see things as I dew—kain't be made ter believe as I dew 'ithout proof. It's all t'other side. Ef we don't find sunthin' ter offset it, whar's yer chance? They'd be as fierce ter string ye up as afore. Wouldn't be onnes'sary long 'bout it neither. Don't hide dif skilties; I don't. We must understand 'em all ef we count on gittin' round 'em."

"Certainly. While we were hanging around the settlement, waiting for the excitement to subside, I thought that, once secretly within this house, it would be an easy matter to discover some proof of Searle's intrigue and crime. But it seems it is not. What can you propose?"

"No more nor you hev, which is ter stay 'round and watch S'arl'. *That* ain't so easy either, 'cos sich as he *suspects* easy. Thar's that piece of shirt-bosom. If we could only git a clew from that!"

"The last thing in the world to give us one," said Linwood. "One of the strongest things against me, besides the knife."

"Jes' so. I took a good squint at that 'ar piece of linen. Ef it kain't be made to prove sunthin' ag'in' S'arl', then I've greatly mistook. *Thet's sed.*"

"What!" exclaimed the young man, eagerly.

Before replying, Tom rose suddenly, and extinguished the light.

"A chap with a bad eye—mor'n all, an *Injun*—don't keer for a light any longer than is nisssary," he said. "Thar *is* a clew 'bout that shirt-bosom, youngster. I diskivered it at fust. You couldn't see it as *I* seen it. The writin' took ye,

an' ye know it's a forg'ry, 'cos ye know it tells a lie. Good mighty, yes! But I—thar, hark!"

The tread of some one was heard coming up the stairs. They recognized the steps as belonging to Bearle. He passed their room, and entered another on the opposite side of the hall, closing the door after him.

The men drew closer together, speaking lower than before.

"What did you see about that shirt-bosom?" Linwood asked, eagerly.

"Whatever 'tis, I don't undertake ter say that it's *proof*, mind. It mout lead ter that, an' it moun't. *That* depends. 'Twas found in the nigger's fist, w'a'n't it?"

"Yes."

"He grapped it while tryin' to defend hisself ag'in' the murderer, as I've understood it."

"Yes; and tore it out as he fell down the rocky embankment of the creek."

"See hyar. The nigger hild on ter that *despril*. A chap's sinews ar' like steel in a death-struggle. The cloth would 'a' hild if it hedn't b'en cut. It was done arter the black man hed b'en pushed partly over the bank, away from his enemy. *Afore* that, he'd b'en close to the murderer, tryin' ter push 'im back, with one hand ag'in' his breast. The stabs he got unnarved his arm, and the murderer pushed *him* back in turn, but 'ithout makin' 'im let go the shirt-bosom. The nigger's heft stretched that out, an' one slash with the knife cut things loose, and sent the darky downwise."

"That must have been the case," said Linwood; "but—"

"It sartin was," resumed the sagacious man. "I seen whar it had be'n cut. Thar's blood around the edge. *These* come from the knife. Thar's blood, few, nigh the middle of that piece of shirt-gear. Tore in several places besides. How come it tore? 'Twas the nigger's fingers an' nails. Them last must have left marks on S'arl's breast! Why not?"

Linwood had been surprised before at his friend's sagacity, but surprise had become wonder. The rough hunter had discovered what might have escaped the notice of a professional detective.

"By heavens!" said Linwood, eagerly, "I believe the clu-

is found. I am almost willing to disclose myself at once, and bring the thing to a test."

"Don't git set up too quick over it," said the wary hunter. "The marks may be so nigh healed by this time that nuthin' can be made of 'em."

"Then the quicker the thing is brought to a test, the better.

"Yes' so; but we'd better wait another day, I consate. 'Twon't make much difference, an' we mout light on some other clue. Ye mout s'arch his room, an' p'raps find sunthin'. Think I could bring about the chance for ye in the mornin'?"

"I will be guided by you. Your planning puts mine in the shade. Wait, then, it is."

"Yes' so," said the Trailer. "Thar's so much arranged. Hey ter wait fur another day to fix things. Sunthin' else may turn up atween spells ter help gin'rally. The p'int now is ter keep yer eyes open, that is, when eyes kin work. Nothin' like obsarvin'. Mighty, no!"

They heard movements in the room of Searle, and thought he was coming out. But the movements at length ceased, at least they heard no more sounds. Every one in the mansion had evidently retired. They felt, however, that Searle might steal out to their door to listen. It would not be unnatural for him to do so. Half an hour passed without either of them speaking or moving, except as those might move who were in unsettled slumber. At the end of that time an almost imperceptible creaking of Searle's door confirmed the suspicion that he had been lurking outside.

"Ye see how easy he is," said Tom. "Ye see how a trifle mout put us 'ithout a chance. This hez got to be a consarned game of wits. That's nothin' more to-night. G'wine ter snooze, I be."

He stretched himself upon the couch, and Linwood followed his example. In, it seemed a long time before sleep visited his eyelids.

Some time after midnight he was awakened by the hunter, who stood in an attitude of listening. Almost immediately he detected slight sounds in Searle's room, and presently his door was opened, and cat-like steps came close to their room. A silence reigned broken only by those sounds which might

denote peaceful slumber. A few seconds afterward they heard the hall-door open and shut carefully. Like phantoms they glided out into the hall, and reached a window at its further extremity, through which they saw a form moving away in the gloom.

"What can this mean?" said Linwood.

"I'll find out if I kin," replied the Trailer. "While we're out, s'arch his room. Ye mout run across sunthin'. Keep ~~it~~ eye out ag'in' our comin' back, mind."

He left his friend's side, descended the stairs, and passed out. Linwood saw him pause, and motion back the root-doctor, who was advancing from the barn, as though to join him. The latter obeyed the sign, and Tom disappeared in the direction taken by Searle.

Linwood then stole back, secured the candle, and entered the room just vacated by Searle. This was a simple matter to do, for none of the doors in the hall had locks upon them, except that which opened into the study of the murdered man. Linwood's first act was to shade the window. Then he struck a light, and examined the room eagerly. It contained but little furniture. A bed, two chairs, and a table with a drawer. This he pulled out, and found writing utensils and sheets of paper, but no writing.

"And yet this is the place, no doubt, where the forgery was executed," thought Linwood. "Too cute a rascal to leave any traces of his work."

A chest stood in a corner of the room, but of course was locked. He felt that it would be useless to examine it, even if there was no danger of being discovered by Searle. The latter had a good supply of clothing hanging about the room. Perhaps the suit worn by Searle on the night of the murder had blood-marks, and had therefore been destroyed. But if that supposition were true, the young man felt that no one could be found who could tell whether any clothes were missing or not. The forged papers! Ah, if he could only find a scrap in that room—a word in Ruggles' hand!

Satisfied that his search would be fruitless, he extinguished his light, left every thing as he had found it, passed out, and went to the further end of the hall to watch for the reappearance of Tom Hawk.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAILER TRAILED.

LINWOOD had not waited long, when, suddenly, he felt a touch upon his arm and wheeled quickly around. A tall figure stood close beside him, and a voice whispered in his ear,

"Come away, youngster; stretwise! Keerful, mind! S'arl'll be up soon, an' mout chance ter see ye, an' it would wake his suspicion. Ye'd staid right thar fur 'im ter seen ye, ef it hadn't b'en for me, I'll sw'ar."

The two glided quickly to their own apartment.

"Now let S'arl' come," added Tom. "Did ye s'arch his room?"

"Yes; but found nothing that could be used in evidence against him. Where did he go? What have you learned?"

"Nothin' fur sartin," answered the hunter. "Ain't through yit. He's a close cuss. No boy, mind. But ef he fools Tom Hawk much, he's welcome."

"In what direction—"

"Hark up!" whispered Tom, suddenly.

Standing close under the open lattice, they heard the hall-door open and close, even more carefully than it had been an hour previous y. Some one stole up, paused a moment at their door, and then passed on into the room beyond.

"Jes' so," whispered the hunter. "A close one, he is. Would make a good scout. I say it squar'. Don't wonder ye found nothin' in *his* room. When chaps like him play fur a big thing they're keerful of thar trail. But the devil gin'-rally opens a gato arter 'em *somewhar*!"

"Where did you follow him?" inquired Linwood.

"To quite a stretch beyond the spot whar he come onto us last night. He turned behind a big knoll of rocks an' bushes. 'Twas some time afore I could circle round so as ter git a squint at 'im on 'tother side. When I did, he'd begun to p'int toward the creek at a place whar the bank was low. When he got thar, he stooped side o' the water an' sloshed his head. Look at *that*! Sposen any one should *happened* to seen 'im?"

Wal, he was took sick or had a faint-spell, an' strolled out for cool air. Took a notion ter souse his head 'cos it *felt* bad. In a minute he turned back an' I had ter keep out o' sight an' watch 'im tew. When I was sure he was comin' stret back hyar I had to hurry oncommon so as to git safe in afore he get too nigh."

"But he *must* have had an object in going out there," said Linwood. "What could it have been?"

"Thar's smulin' hid nigh that ar' knoll. A coat, mebbe, or some other piece o' wearin'-gear that he had on when he done the murder. Had to hide it thar 'cos thar was no way to destroy it."

"Ah!" whispered Linwood. "But if there was blood upon his garment, the water of the creek woul' not only wash it out, but carry the garment where it would never be recognized if discovered."

"Jes' so. But, Scarl' didn't diskiver the blood, or if he did 'twain't till the day arter the murder. At that time, an' for tew days arter, he hedn't a chance to throw any thing into the creek 'ithout danger of bein' seen. If he found a chance, 'twas when the water had gone down so much that any thing throwed in mout be diskivered. That's *my theory*, as you call it."

"It may be as you think," said the young man. "Certain it is that Scarle must have had some other object besides his apparent one in going out at this hour. We must contrive to examine that place."

"Sartin," said Tom. "Thar's a shorter cut to reach it. Shorter by half. S'arl' took a longer route for reasons of his own. In half an hour from this he'll git settled, an' then I'll take another tramp' out thar."

"To-night?"

"B' shore! Why not? Thar's light enough, an' to-morrer we mout n't git a chance to s'arch 'ithout his knowin' it."

They remained close together, conversing in low whispers. When the half-hour was up the Trailer descended through their open window to the ground. A water-break over the window directly below, made the task comparatively easy. In a moment he turned an angle of the mansion and glided away on his mission.

Linwood remained at the window. His thoughts dwelt upon Carrie. He felt that he had yet a place in her heart, and the thought gave him faith and hope. But, he did not forget the dark side of his prospects.

As his thoughts were thus employed the moon disappeared in the far west, and the star-light began to pale, ushering in that gloom which precedes early dawn. Looking toward the barn where the root-doctor slept, Linwood fancied he saw some one dart within. But, the shadows of some tree-branches near the building, swaying to and fro in a light breeze, dispelled the idea, and the young man turned his eyes in the direction from which he every moment expected his friend. Almost before he knew it, Tom appeared beneath the window, and assisted by Linwood was quickly inside.

"What luck?" asked the young man in an eager whisper.

"I found whar thar *was* sunthin' hid, but it was gone," replied Tom, moodily.

In spite of himself, this announcement cast a gloom over the spirits of Linwood.

"Then some one must have taken it," he said. "Perhaps it *was* removed before we came."

"Don't be foolish, youngster," said Tom. "If 't *had* been, what took S'arl' out thar?"

"Ah, then you think he removed it?"

"Hain't sed so, hev I? He *mout*, I allow. Our comin' hyarbouts made 'im oneasy. He went thar to see if any thing hed b'en disturbed, an' *mout* hev moved sunthin' 'ithout my seein' 'im. Don't see how he could hev done it, either. Thar's a cussed witchery *somewhar*! Thet's sed."

The hunter's mood was somewhat sullen. Men of his class, when foiled, do not bear it meekly. Linwood knew this, and questioned discreetly.

"Then the clew we expected is lost," he said.

"Sposin' 'tis?" answered Tom. "Don't expect to find out what we want all ter once. We hain't be'n hyar but a short time. You'll be consid'able better—yer eye will—in the mor'in'. We'll take a stroll about the settlement then. In an hour it'll be daylight. Gwine ter snooze, I be."

He stretched himself upon the couch, and Linwood followed his example. But the latter knew that his friend did not

sleep. His brain was busy working upon the difficult problem which occupied his thoughts.

With the first dawn of light they descended from their room and passed out. The moment they did so, the root-doctor advanced from the barn and met them.

"I heard some one 'bout midnight," he said. "Got up an' seen you. Ye foller'd some one. Was it S'arl?"

"Jes' so, sachim. Gwine ter stroll around ter day. Want you to stay around an' watch S'arl's motions. Onderstand?"

Before the root-doctor could reply, Searle himself came out. Tom was apparently in the midst of an earnest conversation with Dr. Bog about the finding of the murdered man's body.

"Jes' so, sachim. Gwine ter trace out the cussed human thet did it, we be! Gwine ter dew it if it takes a month. Jes' in the line of our perfessions."

At this moment Searle drew near. He greeted the hunter, and inquired after the welfare of his Indian friend. He eyed both keenly, but both were prepared for his scrutiny. If he entertained suspicions, the hunter's quaint remarks dispelled them, and put him at ease.

Breakfast was soon announced. After it was over, Tom started off with the supposed Indian for a stroll through the settlement. Carrie had not appeared during the breakfast hour, but as they moved away Linwood managed to steal a glance back, and saw her looking toward them from an open window. He fancied he saw a weary, dejected expression in her face, but dared not look too closely.

The day wore on in quietness. Early in the afternoon, Carrie Ellingham strolled alone to a natural arbor in the edge of the woods, not far from the mansion. She frequently visited the place to read some chosen book, or to watch the crimson tinges upon the distant mountain-tops. But now an indescribable sadness was over her spirits. She came out to be more alone with her thoughts, which dwelt upon a matter of serious import. A few hours previously, Dorlon Searle had declared his love for her, and solicited her hand in marriage. The proposition did not seem abrupt to Carrie, for the letter found with her late uncle's will had paved the way to this. In fact, she expected it. She had listened to Searle with a strange feeling at her heart. No lover could have expressed

himself more frankly, nor yet more delicately, than Searle. And yet, Carrie involuntarily recoiled at the idea of uniting herself with this man. She did not suspect him of a mercenary motive. She believed that he truly loved her. And then the thought of her uncle's wishes gave the suit a sanction almost equivalent to a solemn command. She certainly entertained a deep respect for Searle, but since the preceding night her feelings had undergone a change for which she could not account ; and when Searle proposed, Carrie, as we have said, recoiled. Somehow the image of Linwood seemed to float between them. She had dreamed of the latter during the night—dreamed that he had stood by her side, called her by an endearing name, protested again his innocence of crime, and adjured her to have faith in him ! In her first waking moments she had thought it *no* dream but a reality ! The matter occupied her thoughts all the morning. In this state of mind, Searle's proposal grated harshly on her ears. She had declined his overtures, but Searle urged his suit with all the eloquence of one whom love had rendered desperate.

"Take time and reconsider your answer," he said. "If your heart is not already given to another—" he paused as if pierced through and through by the thought.

Carrie trembled. To what might his importunities lead ? She would not have her secret in regard to Linwood known or suspected for the world. It was yet too sacred, too solemn. And lest Searle should suspect it, she consented to reconsider her answer to him, trusting that, another time, the task of utterly discarding his suit would be less difficult.

She was thinking of these things now, as she sat alone in the arbor. She felt that she had done wrong in permitting Searle to hope. And yet, why might she not, *some time*, learn to love the one in whom her uncle placed so much confidence ?

She was at length aroused from her reverie by the approach of footsteps, and starting up, saw Tom Gates.

"They told me ye mont be out hyar," he said, pausing a moment in his rapid walk.

"What?" said Carrie, in some trepidation. "Has any thing happened, Mr. Gates?"

She saw an expression of deep excitement in his grim face, as he glanced keenly into hers.

"No, gal—beg pardin—Miss Carrie. No, not *yit*. But suthin's *gwine* ter happen afore long—this arternoon, mibbe. Don't start—'tain't a-gwine ter be nothin' skeery ter *you*."

"What is it, then?—tell me," she asked, as vague suspicions came into her mind.

"Kain't tell ye much now, 'cos thar ain't time," answered Gates. "Only told ye what I hev ter kinder set ye ter watchin', an' keep ye from bein' skeert. When'd ye see S'arl?"

"An hour ago, at dinner. Tell me more of this, Gates. Is there any clue to—to—"

"The murderer? Yis—that *is*. Which way did S'arl go? Tell me that!" said Gates, excitedly.

"Toward the south part of the settlement," answered Carrie, her countenance paling.

"Good! Right to'ards the thickest of the sittlement. *He'll help!*"

"Hold, one moment!" cried Carrie, for Gates was loping abruptly away, at a gait that would soon terminate in a run.

"It's jest *hyar*," he said, pausing for a moment. "Tom Hawk hez got an Injun in tow thet *ain't* an Injun. He's mistakin' ef he thinks he's the only one thet's got sharp eyes. Thet Injun was heerd talkin' with Tom, an' his talk was squar' English. His voice was consid'able like Linwood's. They was hangin' round a knoll, 'bout a mile from *hyar*, as ef thar was sunthin' *thar* they'd loike ter find. Ye'll see afore night. Don't let on ter the sarvants. I must be off!"

And wheeling, he struck into a run, as if to make up for the moment lost in talking to Carrie.

She stood still, in a trance of astonishment. Was it possible that the supposed Indian was Linwood in disguise? Her heart beat wildly. She collected her thoughts. In a moment all became plain. She remembered the last words of Linwood as he fled from the gallows, and did not doubt that he had thus ventured back to ferret out the real murderer. He had fallen in with Tom Hawk, made a confidant of him, and the latter was endeavoring to assist him in his difficult and dangerous task. Would he do thus if he himself were guilty? Would the honest hunter assist him unless convinced of his truth and innocence?

Thus reasoned Carrie, and from that moment every particle

of doubt in regard to Linwood's innocence vanished from her mind. But, it was evident from the manner of Gates that Linwood knew not, as yet, that his identity was known. Perhaps he had not yet made investigations necessary to *prove* his innocence. If so, premature arrest might prevent him from finding those proofs. If already found, as she hoped, they would, almost necessarily, identify and condemn the real criminal. Who could this be?

As such thoughts flashed through her mind, she turned back, pale and agitated, toward the mansion. That new and startling developments would soon arouse the entire settlement she did not doubt. What would be the result she knew not. But she uttered a silent prayer that right might triumph, and justice be meted out to the really guilty.

CHAPTER IX.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

As Carrie passed from view, the root-doctor arose from a secret position adjacent to the arbor. He glanced curiously after her, and then in the direction just taken by Gates. Evidently he had been playing eavesdropper. There was a strange expression on his sun-tanned visage, but he did not seem greatly troubled. For a while he stood as if in doubt what to do. Then turning aside into the bushes, he paused beside a partially-decayed log, one end of which was hollow. From this he drew out something carefully wrapped in an old blanket, and concealing the bundle under his tattered frock-skirt, followed in the steps of Carrie. A curious smile lit up his sallow features now, and his movements seemed unusually agile for one of his appearance.

As he drew near the mansion grounds his movements became more weary, and he glanced sharply around. Apparently satisfied that no one could be watching him, he turned again a few paces to the left of the path, and approached the barn, which stood in a line with him and the mansion. Eu-

tering it, he remained a few moments inside, and then came out, minus the bundle. Glancing toward the mansion he saw that none of the servants were in sight. He immediately darted behind the barn, and taking a circuit, hurried toward the knoll which Tom Hawk had visited the previous night. Before going half the distance he suddenly paused, as though a new consideration had arrested his steps.

"There, no doubt, but *watched*, probably," he soliloquized. "Otherwise, Gates would not have left them. Things *will* come to a pass soon, and what matters it how or when? I will wait here, then, till the rush begins."

And settling himself where he could both see and hear any movements likely to be going on around him, he waited.

Meantime the movements of Dr. Bag had not been unnoticed as he supposed. A few moments before his arrival at the barn a pair of keen black eyes were upon him, and a figure was dogging his steps with the stealthiness of a panther. As soon as he had concealed the mysterious bundle and disappeared in the direction of the knoll, Searle rose from cover a short distance from the barn, and advancing eagerly, darted inside as quickly as the doctor had done. Nothing could escape his eyes then. He soon found the bundle where it had been secreted by the doctor. Eagerly he unrolled it; but he was little prepared for the shock that awaited him. He turned pale as death, and a cold sweat stood upon his brow. But he had no time to spare. Securing the bundle, he rushed forth to the woods. Half a mile within its depths, he stopped where there was a soft, muddy spot, parts of which were covered by stagnant water. Into this he dropped the bundle, pressing it deep into the mire with his foot. Then he gathered a number of stones, which he sunk in the same spot, and watched a moment till the mud and water had settled over it.

With the exception that his countenance was still a trifle pale, every sign of emotion was now gone from Searle. He knew there was danger impending, but the first shock was over and he was nerved to meet it. By the merest accident Gates had missed Searle, who knew nothing of his friend's suspicion. He was advancing leisurely toward the mansion, having come from the southern part of the settlement. His thoughts were probably dwelling upon his prospects with

Carrie, for he had turned aside from the regular path till he found one which would lead by the arbor. Evidently he had hoped to find her there. On nearing the spot he caught glimpse of the root-doctor some distance beyond. Noticing that the latter's movements were cautious, he crouched after him, with the results just stated.

Searle did not linger a moment near the spot where he had buried the bundle. He hurried back with all speed, and passing the barn followed in the footsteps of the doctor. His mind had, within the last twenty minutes, taken in all the probabilities of the situation. Not only that the root-doctor was a spy upon his movements, but that the supposed Indian might be Linwood in disguise. The doctor's action, and the discovery of the bundle he endeavored to secrete, were keys which unlocked to these probabilities. But still the man did not shrink.

The *only* evidence which could in the least implicate him was gone. He was sure of that. *All* the fearful evidence which could be arrayed against Linwood—if the supposed Indian were indeed he—was at hand. He had the confidence and good-will of every one in the entire settlement, while the prejudice and hate against Linwood continued unabated. The presence and influence of Trailer Tom were what he most dreaded. But he trusted to circumstances and his own address, to either change the hunter's impressions of Linwood, or to render his influence in his favor vain. As to the root-doctor's possible testimony—what would it avail in the absence of proof?

Reflections, something like these, must have passed in Searle's mind, as he pressed forward with wary steps. His object was to find the doctor. Possibly the latter had gone to meet and confer with his confederates, Tom and the Indian. If so, the whole chain of Searle's suspicions would be perfect, and he could devise every expedient, with a full knowledge of facts before him.

He moved with intense caution, and yet rapidly. At last, coming to a slight rise of ground, over which he knew Dr. Bag must have passed, he peered ahead and saw the latter busily engaged in *sorting roots* near the base of a decayed stump.

Searle stood, regarding him for a few moments in deep

surprise. He knew not how to reconcile the other's apparent indifference with his movements of scarcely half an hour previous. He resolved, however, to steal past him, and go on toward the rocky knoll. It was first necessary to retrace his steps for a short distance, which he did carefully. Then he circled around, hastening toward the place of his destination. Through a rift in the bushes, which grew beside his path, he caught a view of the mansion and suddenly stopped. A plan of action came into his mind, as bold as it might be successful, in case of the worst. Instead of going forward, he turned and took another circuit, which in the course of ten minutes brought him back near the barn. He thence approached the mansion without any indication of haste, though his desire to hasten was intense.

He entered the mansion. He did not see Carrie, and none of the servants appeared to notice him. He ascended the stairs, and assuring himself that no one was upon the upper floor, at once entered the room where Tom and Linwood had passed the night. Leaving the door ajar, so that he could hear if any one approached, he quickly, though carefully, searched Linwood's chest. In the bottom he found a light-colored dress-coat, much worn and somewhat soiled. Quickly securing this about his own person, so that it would not be noticed, he passed down to the hall-door and opening it, stood for a moment, his eyes sweeping the place before him. No one was in sight, except one of the negroes. Paying no heed to him he sauntered leisurely away. But, as soon as he got where no one could see him from the house he stopped, and taking out his knife, rolled up his sleeve, and made an incision in his arm, just above the elbow. As the blood oozed from the wound, he allowed it to drop upon Linwood's stolen garment in several places, where it would be conspicuous.

"Plot and counterplot," he exclaimed. "My wits have never failed me yet. I don't think they will now. A risky game, but the prize is worth the risk. The worst risk is open conviction, the result of which would be death! Even *that* shan't deter me now. *That* avoided or warded off, the next and *only* remaining risk is that *she* might be so wrought upon by certain events as to refuse my suit for good and all. What then? Simply to prepare for flight, by securing a goodly sup-

ply of gold and silver about me, the whereabouts of which I happen to know. Then to bring into requisition a certain drug which will enable me to take a very tender leave of—”

He ceased these rapid, half-muttered expressions, and a cold, cruel smile came into his face as, having again secured the stolen garment about him, he moved on, with quick, stealthy bounds toward the rocky knoll. He had a purpose in view, which the reader can, perhaps, easily divine.

Meantime the sun was getting low in the west, casting somber, gloomy shadows, which produced any thing but a sense of enjoyment upon the spirits of Linwood. With his friend Tom he was slowly advancing toward the mansion. They had been busy through the day, visiting different parts of the settlement, but learning nothing that could aid Linwood's case in the least. They had last visited the cabin of Gates, where they were entertained with true backwoods hospitality. But when the subject of the late murder was discussed, Linwood listened in vain for one word expressive of sorrow or doubt concerning his guilt. The settler was deeply rooted in his convictions, and as unrelenting in his purpose, should Linwood ever be caught, as death itself. Trailer Tom once hinted at the possibility of there being a plot against the young man ; but this Gates scouted as absurd. And when the two left him, leaning upon his ax, his eyes followed the retreating figure of the supposed Indian with an expression that would have caused the latter much uneasiness had he known it.

And later, when they strolled back by way of the rocky knoll, they little imagined that Gates was following them, accompanied by two of his fellow-settlers. Nor did they notice when he moved stealthily away, leaving his two companions to watch their every movement.

The hunter himself was in a moody frame of mind. He did not despair for his young friend, but he chafed at the thought that Searle, or some one else, had circumvented him in regard to whatever had been hidden near the knoll they had just left. The “cussed witchery” of the case puzzled him more than he was willing to admit.

They were conversing about Bill Ennis as they drew near the mansion.

“There seems to be no prospect of picking up any thing

against Searle, unless we can get some one to assist us," said Linwood. "I think Bill would befriend me thus far, if I were to risk a disclosure to him."

"Orter know, sh'u'd say," remarked Tom. "Try it on. Ef he won't befriend ye so fur, let the thing come out *squar'*. Jes' so. Thar'd be a Parin' time, likely. Be fur stringin' ye up ter once atween heavin an' earth, mibe. Jist thar'd be when Tom H'vuk'd come in fur *hercise-like*. Git acquainted with the hull on me then--some o' the F'rmost would. Oh, mighty, yis!"

As the hunter thus spoke, his huge form seemed to dilate, and his left hand closed upon Linwood's shoulder with a grip that caused the latter nearly to cry out.

"Remember, I'm not of the foremost," he said, writhing from his friend's grasp.

"Gittin' cramp'd, youngster, I be," said Tom, in apology. "This kind o' play, or *strategy*, ain't in my nat'ral line. Too slow, too narrer. Thar ain't even the smell o' powder, nor likely ter be. Ain't no notion o' givin' it up, mind; but I must bring things to a *squar'* fight afore long, or *bu'st*. Thet's *bed!*"

"We may learn something to night by remaining here," said Linwood. "To-morrow I will venture to make myself known—or you can—to Bill Ennis. There's not a better one to approach."

"Jes' so. We're nighin' the house. Take keer of yer gait, fur sharp eyes are watching us, likely."

The disguised Indian walked, according to Indian custom, directly behind his friend. They were still a dozen of rods or so from the mansion when the latter slackened his gait.

"See-hyar, youngster."

"What?"

"Ye seem ter think ye mout trust the gal. Dew it! Reveal yerself the first chance ye git. Don't git confuddled, nor don't skeer 'er. Ef things ar' as you think, *she* mout dew more for ye in a scrape than any other human. Git a woman on a trail whar 'er heart's consarned! Hain't I seen it tried in my time. 'Thet's my advice?'"

"And I'll follow it," said Linwood, in a low tone, as they stopped before the door.

In a moment more, he had followed his friend into the hall. To the surprise of both, Carrie Essingham stood confronting them—had apparently been waiting for them there. With a gesture of caution she led them into a room communicating with the kitchen. They saw that she was pale and agitated.

"Linwood, your disguise has been penetrated," she said, stepping close to his side, and laying her hand upon his arm. "Tell me once more that you are innocent—innocent in spite of the terrible evidences against you!"

He started back at her words, and almost trembled with excitement. Tom Hawk stretched out his hand, resting it on the muzzle of his rifle, and bent toward them with a grunt of surprise and satisfaction. There was plainly a crisis approaching, something that smacked of excitement, danger, and adventure. His spirits rose a hundred per cent.

"Innocent, as God is my judge," replied Linwood. "You know the reason of my coming back in this disguise. It is to prove my innocence by discovering the real murderer, and finding proof against him. Would I venture here otherwise?"

"Enough," said Carrie, speaking hurriedly. "I found it hard work to doubt you through all. I can not now. But have you *found* proof? What of that bloody knife, and that other fatal relic torn from your—from *some* one's bosom? And that writing in the memorandum-book—that! Oh, Linwood, what is the mystery? Who is the murderer?"

"One whom you, and doubtless the whole settlement, believe to be the impersonation of all the virtues," said Linwood, bitterly. "One who, under a smiling, plausible exterior, hides a spirit as subtle, mercenary and wicked as Satan himself—Dorlon Searle!"

"He? Oh, heaven! Searle? Can this be true?"

"As I hope to prove in good time," answered Linwood. "Who else could have forged your uncle's writing in the memorandum-book, stating that which I *know* to be false, and which therefore your uncle could have never written. Who but he—"

"Wait up!" interrupted Tom, suddenly. "Whar's S'arle now, gal? Who's diskivered the disguise? Who knows on't besides yerself? That comes fust, jest now."

"I should have told you before that numbers—half the

settlement—know all by this time," she said. "Gates hinted it to me more than an hour ago."

"Gates!" echoed Tom, savagely.

"He was looking for Searle when I saw him," she added. "Speak low. The latter came in some time ago, and must be in his room now, knowing all, and waiting for Linwood's arrest. A posse will be here soon, no doubt, for that purpose. Oh, Linwood, and *you*, brave man, who have assisted him, have you that at hand with which to disprove the fearful evidence against you? You are to meet men who are impatient of close investigation, whose prejudices are set, and whose passions are inflamed. Are you ready?"

"As ready as it is possible to be now," said Linwood. "There is no time for more preparation, unless you yourself can remember—"

"Hark!" interrupted Tom.

Listening, they heard the gathering tramp of many feet without.

CHAPTER X.

THE LIFE AND DEATH.

"THEY'RE comin'!" exclaimed the hunter.

"I must not be seen with you now," said Carrie. "Pass out and appear to be advancing from the kitchen as they enter. Meet their rudeness with no show of anger. It would result in violence on the spot."

"We'll see 'bout the *vierlunce*," said the Trailer. "Leave the *interdiction* ter me, youngster, an' do *you* keep pertic'lar cool. 'Tain't onlikely that they'll try ter rush things at first. But, ef I don't set thar consarned notions back a trifle my name ain't Trailer Tom; that's *scd*. Now come on."

Linwood paused for a second, looked into the face of Carrie, and extended his hand. She returned his warm clasp, and then turned away. A thrill of joy, sweeter than he had ever before known, filled his breast as his heart interpreted the look she gave him.

He quickly followed his friend from the room. They had just reached the position designated by Carrie, when the front door was thrown violently open and a crowd of men, headed by the implacable Gates, burst into the hall. There was not only the sound of feet, but of voices—rough, turbulent and fierce. Linwood stood partly behind his friend. The form of the latter was drawn up to its full height. His eyes glimmered with that peculiar excitement which arouses every power of body and mind without detracting in the least from coolness and self-possession.

In a twinkling the crowd had pressed up to within a yard or two of the men, where they paused. Among the foremost, besides Gates, Linwood noticed Searle and Bill Ennis.

"Thar 'e is, 'sure!"

"Yes, ef Gates ain't mistook."

"Whar? I don't see 'im. Show 'im up."

"Let's see ef 'tis the cuss. Fetch 'im out. What 're ye waitin' fur thar in front?"

"That's the tork. We're gwine ter know fust, afore that's any omnisssary p'rlayer, Tom Hawk or not. Snatch 'im out amongst us—him *alone*, or *both* on 'em."

Such were the mingled exclamations that burst from a score of voices in half as many seconds. Linwood shuddered. The firm attitude of the Trailer, and above all, his reputation, had probably an influence over these men, and yet kept them at a distance, notwithstanding the advice of the last speaker.

"Hold up, men!" cried Gates; "'tain't no way. We'll come at 'it reg'lar."

"Reg'lar or not, ef I kain't see I'm gwine ter *feel* ef that ar' 's an Injun," interrupted a strapping young fellow, who bounced suddenly forward ahead of the rest.

"Jes' so!" said Tom, coolly. "Better wait up a trifle, p'raps. Don't like ter be crowded, I don't!"

And thus speaking, he took a step forward, grasped the intruder by neck and thigh, and raising him clear from the floor, pitched him back fully ten feet into the midst of his companions.

This sudden and extraordinary exhibition of strength created a sensation. The apparent ease and coolness with which thefeat was done raised a murmur of involuntary applause. None seemed offended except the one who had been roughly handled.

He staggered to his feet with a look so bewildered that it created a laugh.

"Ha! ha!" echoed Tom Hawk, in response. "You, Gates! Don't thet mind ye of how you an' me used ter *pitch grates* with them friendly Injuns up the Elk? Does me; be slashed ef it don't. Hain't practiced *sence*, till now. Gwine tew though. Light weights 'll dew ter begin with. Oh mighty, yes!"

Again a laugh went round, but it was only of a moment's duration. Then followed exclamations, inquiries, and calls for the Indian. They were savage, but less turbulent than at first. The hunter had gained his *first object*. Gates again spoke:

"Ye know what we're hyar for, Tom. We know well enough who 'tis ye've had under tow. It's Fred Linwood—him thet murdered Archibald Ruggles. I know 'im in spite of his Injun toggery. What's tak *you* ter shield a murderer, an' help 'im ter hatch up sunthin mebbe ag'in'?"

"Hold jest *that*, Tom Gates!" interrupted Hawk, with a tiger in his tone that surprised Linwood. "Yeou an' me ar' acquainted, ain't we? Know me, don't ye? Then be a trifle p'rty lar 'bout yer gab when *I'm* yer subject. Don't let out *ay'in* thet I'm tryin' ter shield a murderer, 'cos ef ye dew—"

"Hear *that*! men of the settlement, you who were the friends of Archibald Ruggles!" broke in Searle, fiercely. "He cajoles *first*, and then threatens! Being an uncommon man himself, he thinks we are children—tame at that. Never mind it, Gates! Come on, boys! Let's take our prisoner back under our own guard *first*, and then see what's to be done!"

As he uttered these words, he sprung suddenly upon the Trailer and Linwood, with a half-dozen of the more reckless at his back!

Linwood thought it not best to resist. He knew it would not only be useless, *then*, but might arouse a yet stronger prejudice against him in the trial which he expected. But he little suspected the object of Searle. It was no less than *to take the life of his friend*. Linwood saw this when his own arms were pinioned in the grasp of two or three who jerked him from Tom's side. The latter, at the moment of attack, shot out his powerful arms with a force and rapidity that tum-

bled his assailants back as though they were nine-pins. Others were crowding up, and the hall was filled with yells, oaths, and maledictions. With a quick glance at Linwood, Tom drew his knife, stepped a little back from the rabble now pressing upon him, and cried :

"On yer lives, keep back till I—"

"Explain," he would have said, but he did not finish then. Searle had kept purposely one side till he saw Tom's knife drawn. He had waited for this movement, expected and desired it. While the hunter's arm was raised he slipped suddenly forward, and with almost lightning quickness aimed a knife-blow at the hunter's heart. The latter barely parried it, thanks to Bill Ennis, who saw the action and grasped Searle's shoulder.

The Trailer seemed wild then. Uttering a half-Indian war-whoop, he grasped Searle and dashed him to the floor with such force that he lay stunned.

"See hyar!" he exclaimed, in a voice of thunder, as with one foot upon the prostrate man he confronted the crowd. "Don't crowd onter me, 'cos I ain't used tew it. Gin me a chance an' I'll explain. I don't want ter raise a hand ag'in' a man hyar. I've sou't fur you an' men like you nigh twenty ye'rs, an' ye know it. Now, 'm I ter be heerd or not?"

There was a majesty in his look, attitude, and tones heard clear above the din, which produced a temporary hush in the confusion.

"Yes," cried Gates and Ennis together. "Fall back, boys. No one is injured. The prisoner is secure. Silence, and hear him."

"Let up S'arl' fust!"

"Let 'im up. Is 'e hurt bad?"

"Take off yer foot. Whaf's the use?"

This was the round of exclamations following the appeal of Ennis and Gates.

"Thar 'e is; take keer on 'im," said Tom, as he raised Searle up and pushed him back into the hands of Gates. He was not seriously injured; but his face was like marble, and his eyes gleamed with hate and fear.

"Was bent on makin' an eend of me, *sudden'*," continued the hunter, glancing fiercely at Searle; "now, what was it for?"

"Do you ask *that!*!" cried Searle, with desperate hardihood. "Whose knife was raised first?"

"Your'n was *perpared* fust, you cussed wretch! You brought this tussle to a pass, so's ter git a chance at me. I war a trifle fust in drawin' my knife I allow. All on ye war pressin' me up with sich yells in yer throats, that I done it more from habit; it seemed fur a minnit as though 'twur Injuns! You, Gates, war ter blame. No man wants ter accuse me *trice* of screenin' a murderer. I don't dew sich things knowin'ly. 'Tis him ye've got hyar—Linwood. I got 'im away from the Injuns, an' he told me his story *squar'*, not leavin' out that every thin' was ag'in' 'im—knife, shirt-gear, the niggur's testermony, an' all. *Spite* of all, he swore 't he was inneerent. It had a hard look I allow. So *he* sed. But, he sed 'twar a plot ag'in' 'im, an' told *who* 'twas he suspected!"

Dave paused, and glanced at Searle significantly. There was perfect silence now. Every one followed his glance. But Searle met it boldly with a half-smile upon his face. The man's hardihood and self-possession were remarkable.

"I allow that I b'l'eved him," resumed Dave. "More'n ever when he was willin' ter put hisself in my power an' risk hisself back among ye. I fixed 'is disguise. We got up that ruse the better to s'arch out sunthin' ter *prove* 'is inneerence. Mebbe I've b'en *tuk in*? Mebbe he's guilty, but has run all this resk to gain some pertic'lar eend arter throwin' his guilt on some one else? But, I kain't b'l'eve so *yit*. That's the man he suspects," pointing to Searle. "Now, let *both* be tried!"

The most intense excitement now prevailed. But it was not turbulent. Curiosity, doubts, and questions were expressed simultaneously by the crowd. Bill Ennis, more than any one else, seemed thunderstruck. Linwood had spoken to those who were holding him, and they released his arms. He speedily tore the disguise from his head, and stood more plainly recognized through his paint.

"I court the trial," said Searle, firmly. "Let it come. *Direct* evidence against Linwood is already at hand. You all know what that evidence is, and its strength. *There is more*, but let it pass now. Let whatever the hunter and his friend can bring against me come at once. I wish to hear it and *meet it!*"

By this time the large hall was densely packed, and scores crowded near the door, unable to get in.

"This way, then!" cried a number of voices. "Let it be outside, so that all can hear and see."

"It's best," cried Gates. "Let's move out. Thar ain't room hyar."

And accordingly the excited, expectant crowd joined those outside. Linwood and his friend took a position near the walls of the mansion. Near them stood Searle, Gates, Ennis and several others of the older and influential settlers. Back of these, in a sort of semicircle, stood the crowd, eager for proceedings to commence. Gates was looked upon as the one to conduct the trial.

"First thing," he began, "we want the evidence ag'in' Linwood afore us. It's in the house. Let some one bring it out."

One of the negroes obeyed. And taking up the bloody articles, Gates continued :

"Ye see this knife, Linwood? Is it yours? You k'n answer, or we k'n bring as many as we want ter prove it's your'n."

"There is no need," answered the prisoner. "It is mine."

"Very well. Then, next is this 'ere piece of a shirt-bosom, which, as ye see, has got blood-spots on it. Ye know in whose hands 'twas found, men. The sarcumstances is fresh in yer minds." (This to a dozen of the older settlers, who had been hastily improvised as a jury.) "Now, prisoner, as afore, ye k'n answer or not whether it's your'n."

"It *is* mine," returned Linwood.

"Next, then, is the nigger's everdunce," proceeded Gates. "'Tain't nessary ter have *him* hyar. He gin it in *solumly* when he expected to die. He confronted the prisoner an' *sture* 'twas him thet pushed his master to his death. Thar's hardly one presunt thet didn't hear it. Thar's no use of rakin' over everdunce any furder, 'cos it's understood an' has been sifted. So fur, it's *clean* ag'in' the prisoner. Ef he's got any proof ter off-set *this*, we're ready to hear it an' see it."

All eyes were upon Linwood as he prepared to speak. One of the servants had brought him water, with which he had removed the paint from his face. It bore traces of his recent sufferings, but his eye was clear and his voice firm.

He first called upon Trailer Tom to relate what he had seen of Searle's movements during the past night. Searle gave an almost imperceptible start as he heard the call. The hunter obeyed it, giving an account of Searle's stealthy midnight movements, his visit to the rocky knoll, and his own discovery afterward of a place there where something had been secreted. He advanced no theory concerning these movements. He left that for his young friend. As he concluded, he turned and saw the root-doctor near him. The latter said something in a low tone to Tom, and then turned away. Tom seemed deeply surprised, and glanced with wonder toward the doctor. Then to his friend who had begun to speak.

Linwood, at first, had little to present except probability. Laying bare the probable incentives that led Searle to commit the crime, he proceeded to work up his theory of the latter's plot to remove two persons in the way of his aspirations. Those two were Archibald Ruggles and himself. He spoke as one may who speaks to defend life and honor.

"This is the theory which I present," he said, as he took up the piece of shirt-bosom. "That portion of it referring to *this*, I can explain *here and now*."

As he thus spoke, he glanced upon Searle, who, despite himself, turned a shade paler.

"The proof! the proof!" exclaimed a score, in their eagerness.

"*Silence!*" cried Gates.

"I shall *call* for it in a moment," resumed Linwood. "But first look at this," and he held up the bloody object. "Around the edge it is *cut*, not torn. It is *only* torn near the middle, where the finger-nails of the negro clutched desperately at the bosom of his assailant. My theory assumes that the shirt was worn by the assailant *in such* a manner that there was nothing to prevent the negro's nails from drawing blood from his would-be master's underer. If not, how account for blood in these places? Five spots, you'll observe, more or less plain! Now I call for proof—*examine Searle's breast!*"

In their intense excitement, the crowd rushed tumultuously forward. Linwood felt his heart beat wildly. He felt the agony of the moment. If this clue failed, it was his last!

With perfect coolness, and a hard smile upon his face, Searle

arose and anticipated the wishes of the jury and crowd by removing enough of his upper garments to admit of examination. It was necessarily short, but thorough! *No marks were there!*"

Linwood could not conceal his terrible disappointment. The crowd again fell back, and all eyes were again turned upon him. Notwithstanding the failure, they evidently entertained doubts of his guilt, or at least began to analyze the probability of his theory.

"What else?" said Searle in malicious triumph. "Of course he expected to find nothing! A very good *ruse* to establish an impression that he is, or may possibly be, innocent. What else? Proof is required, remember! And failing in that, even *Carrie Eysingham can not assist him to escape this time!*"

As he concluded with these words, murmurs of deep surprise were heard among the crowd. The secret of Carrie's connivance at Linwood's escape was not understood in a moment. Standing near a window, just above, she heard the *dénouement*, and sunk back from view, deeply agitated.

"Villain! wretch!" cried Linwood. "Is *that* necessary, besides your forgery of Ruggles' handwriting, to fortify you against detection?"

"See hyar?" exclaimed Trailer Tom, suddenly. "We ain't through with the matter of *proof* yit! Oh mighty, no! You thar, Doctor Bag? Come forrad!"

The latter stood not far off, having just pushed his way inside the circle. Searle glanced at him scornfully. He wore a perplexed look, and did not obey Tom's call till the latter had repeated it.

"What a fitting aliy!" remarked Searle, derisively.

"Don't mouth few much, mister!" growled Tom. "He'll manage ter sit suthin' to yer neck, mebbe. Now, Yaller-Face, ur Dr. Bag, ef 't suits ye better, we're ready fur the testimony an' *proof* ye spoke about awhile ago. The time's come; out with it!"

Again Linwood's courage revived. The hunter's manner bespoke something in his favor; but the root-doctor's manner showed real perplexity.

"I wur s'archin' fur yarbs nigh the knoll," he said, with much embarrassment. "'Twur the place whar *he* follered

"im," pointing first to Tom Hawk and then to Searle. "I cum across a spot nigh a stump whar sunthin' had—had b'en. Thought so, I did, anyhow. So I looked sharp an' found whar a heap of stumps had b'en piled over a spot that looked 's 'ough the sile had been scooped out an' then scooped back ag'in. I moved the stumps an' found in a hole which I dug out under 'em, a coat! Thar wur spots of blood on the right-arm sleeve, an' 't looked as 'ough 'twur lately put out thar!"

"Jes' so," exclaimed Tom, with sudden satisfaction. "I knowed it! Jest what we want, that is. An' ef it don't help somebody tew a rope I'll eat it! That's sed. Don't stand; bring it out. What 're ye waitin' fur?"

The root-doctor did not offer to move, but looked at Tom imploringly.

"Go on!" repeated Tom, impatiently.

"I—I—brought it to th'—th'—barn out thar an' hid it, but some one—sunthin'—somebody's stole it," said the now thoroughly frightened doctor.

Despite the terrible interest which every one felt, this finale of an expected *dénouement* created a laugh among the entire crowd. The Trailer clenched his huge fists in chagrin, and approached the root-doctor, who shrunk back before him.

"See hyar," he said. "Hey ye b'en playin' me false? How long sence ye found *that*? *Whar'd* ye hide it in the barn? Come an' show me, *quick!* It's *got* ter be found. Know it! It's *got* ter be!"

He had seized the doctor's arm in his excitement, but dropped it again as the voice and words of Searle arose behind him.

"It's *my* turn now," cried the latter. "The last act in this arranged comedy has been played, and the result is what you see. I have a theory, and it is a very plain one. On pretense that I have plotted against Linwood, he has plotted against me. Failing to *prove* any thing, he has endeavored to create an impression against me, thus hoping to leave the question of his own guilt in doubt, notwithstanding the actual *proof* against *him*. He has succeeded in convincing the hunter of his innocence merely by his *daring* to venture back here. A powerful *attraction* has led him here. I will not say what it is. And now I have a suggestion to make—I want a dozen

men to go immediately and search that knoll thoroughly. If there is an appearance of any thing's having been hidden there—which I doubt—let *them* say. “This old man”—pointing to the root-doctor—“well, he is old and simple, easily worked upon, and we can excuse *him*. Now, who will go?”

A dozen or fifteen men at once broke from the crowd and hurried in the direction of the knoll. Tom left his friend's side, and taking the root-doctor went to the barn followed by a number of the men.

They searched the place thoroughly but of course without any result. The doctor maintained that he had found what he said, and his manner was so earnest that not a few began to believe him. Tom searched the ground about the barn carefully, and for some time. Suddenly he found tracks, here and there visible, leading in a straight line toward the forest. He followed these up with a faint hope that they would lead him to the spot where the doctor's bundle had been conveyed. Who could have stolen it unless it were Searle himself? Eagerly his mind began to fathom such a probability, when a shout from the mansion warned him of the approach of Searle's party.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PROOF OF PROOFS!

With quick strides the Trailer hurried back to the side of his friend. The young man looked gloomy enough. The hunter had fears, but did not betray his intense anxiety. As his friend's perils increased, he was the more firmly resolved to save him at all honorable hazards.

“What's the result?” asked the latter.

“Nothin' as yit, youngster. ‘Tain't done with, mind. Whatever happens they ain't gwine ter rush things.”

“Can you believe the root-doctor has played a double part—that he is working against me in secret?”

“No. BP' ve he did find what he says, that 'twas stole, an' thet S'arl' stole it. Thet's what's comfustered sachim,

Thar's gwine ter be another day at this. 'Tain't gwine ter eend in a rush. Take heart. Hyar they come. Now we'll see what the cuss's object was ef he *hed* any."

The hunter had spoken only for the ears of his friend. As he finished, the men who had been sent to the knoll came up.

"Now let's hear?"

"What's the upshot?"

"How 'bout Dr. Bag's heap?"

"'D ye find whar sunthin' had—had—b'en?" said a voice so cleverly imitating the doctor's that a laugh was raised at the latter's expense.

"We did that, in sober airnest," replied the foremost of the men, and he pulled from the folds of his hunting-shirt, a light coat which he handed to Gates. The latter unrolled the garment and gazed at it closely. Then with a strange look he passed it to those immediately next him. A score knew the coat. As it circulated from hand to hand through the crowd, threats and glances concentrated on the hapless prisoner. He was pale as death. Searle appeared as much astonished as any one.

"What—good mighty—is thet ar'—is 't *yourn*, youngster?" said Tom, clutching his friend's arm excitedly.

"Silence, men!" said Gates at this moment. "We want ter 'ear jest whar this was found."

The others testified that they had found the coat secreted in a crevice of the rocks, which had been partially filled by small stones and then a pile of dead branches hauled over it.

"An' was n't thar no other place that 'peared—that had b'en used ter hide sunthin'?" inquired Dr. Bag.

"No—sea'cely. None sich 's *yeou* telled of, old chap!" replied the spokesman.

The doctor seemed to shrink before the fierce looks of the crowd. The hunter himself seemed utterly taken aback. The silence that had momentarily ensued, was broken by Gates.

"Linwood," he said, solemnly, "in course ye won't deny that this coat is *yourn*! Thar's spots of blood on it—on the right sleeve! What have ye ter say? In the mind of every man hyar thar kain't be but one kinclusion!"

"But there *can*!" exclaimed Linwood. "It is a device—a continuation of Searle's dark plot against me. 'Twas placed

there by him to guard against the remotest possibility of suspicion that might arise against himself—to anticipate what might possibly happen, and what has happened—my reappearance here. He had time and opportunity to do this. With the *forged presentment* it was considered enough to blast me and guard him forever. Satan himself could not have been more secret—more subtle! "Wretch! Fiend!" he added, turning upon Searle, "I will not despair, even now. I can not believe Heaven will permit you to succeed!"

He spoke with agonized emphasis. Great beads of sweat stood upon his face. His repeated failures to adduce proof against his enemy, and this last unexpected evidence against *himself*, were appalling. But, his words drew attention to Searle.

"Very good for stage effect, but of little use here," remarked the latter, coolly. "Mark!" he added, with indignant emphasis. "You have heard his statement. You have heard his summing up of possibilities unsupported by a shadow of proof. Who was it, he or his friend, that first proposed to follow me last night? Which of them first suspected that something was hidden near the knoll? And, why did he not, a short time ago, dwell more on the theory that I had there secreted something? Supposing his friend had searched in vain, why did not the prisoner at once ask that the knoll be searched to find proof in support of his theory? Because he feared that the search would reveal too much, as it has! In his heart he did not thank this brave but mistaken hunter when he made it necessary for him to even mention the knoll. And what is the root-doctor's testimony? It would not require even the cunning imputed to *me* to corrupt *him*. Linwood has done it. Now, he asks you to believe—what? A theory with nothing to rest upon. A pile of propositions and surmises—one resting upon another, without a shadow of evidence that a single one is true or even probable. And he asks you to believe these as against *me*, in face of all the damning evidence, ay, proof, against himself. What is his defense, what his story, but a desperate struggle in the mire of his own guilt, which only sinks him deeper? I don't ask that you take immediate vengeance, but the murderer of Archibald Ruggles—"

Before he could proceed further, Carrie Effingham struggled

through the crowd as upon a former occasion. As she stepped to the hunter's side, she held up a letter.

"Men, neighbors!" she cried, "you see this. Now, hear me for a moment. I wish first to make a confession. *I did* help the prisoner to escape before. It was because I could not believe him guilty, and I can not now. I believe Searle indeed forged my uncle's handwriting. I believe 'twas he that drew up that presentment, as well as that other paper found with the will. Look at this letter! It was written about three weeks ago by my uncle, who intended to send it to a friend in Portsmouth. He was to have sent it by Sinclair, who, you remember, started to go there at that time. But for some reason my uncle changed his mind, and kept the letter. Now, Searle required a copy to work from!"

She paused a moment, glancing toward him.

"A servant found the letter four days ago, in the large fireplace. She put it by without thinking to tell me until this trial was in progress. The letter, as you can all see, is somewhat yellow from the effects of smoke and heat! When the servant brought it to me it aroused my suspicions. I went to Searle's room. The stone-chimney passes through it. I looked closely and saw where a small stone had been loosened. I drew it out, and the aperture is to be seen through which Searle dropped that letter after having used it. But he was *careless!* There is a time when the most cunning rascal in the world will become so. The draft of the chimney prevented this letter from dropping into the fire till it had nearly died out. Then the letter fell from some nook in the chimney! On the strength of these facts I ask you to pause!"

"An' so we're *gwine* tew, ain't we?" exclaimed Tom. "I ain't through yit! Kain't b'f'eve yit that Dr. Bag 's a fool; nor crazy, nuther! Thar's a trail of *some one* leadin' from the barn yonder, whar he says he hid what was found at the knoll. Too late ter foller it now, but I kin in the mornin'!"

As the Trailer spoke he glanced hard at Searle. The latter could not but see that Carrie's timely appearance and statements, together with Tom's firmness, had turned the tide. It was evident that the settlers were resolved to wait till every thread of evidence was followed to the end. He knew there was little hope for him in such an event. But, his remarkable

hardihood did not desert him. Before the worst came he could flee. He had yet his liberty. He trusted to his ready tact to retain it, till he could leave the settlement *well supplied*.

"I bow in deference to Miss Carrie's wishes," he said. "True, there is no hurry. Let full time be allowed before action is taken. If more *possibilities* are to be hatched up against me, let them come. In my own defense I have proof only to offer. Trusting in One who knows my innocence, I defy—"

"Wretch! Liar! Blasphemer! Beware what you say!" came a deep, husky voice from the crowd, interrupting Searle and causing all to glance around in search of its author.

The words had hardly ceased to resound, when Dr. Bag drew forward and placed himself directly before Searle.

"You say, or were just *going* to say, you *defied* proof," said the doctor. Then, suddenly raising his voice, he added, "I will show proof, villain, that will settle this whole case at once. Do you still insist that that presentment is no forgery?"

As he thus spoke, his stooping form became erect, his shabby exterior fell off as though by magic, and *Archibald Ruggles stood revealed before them all!*"

For a moment the whole crowd stood aghast. The next, Carrie, with a glad cry, threw herself into his arms. And then, the very air was rent with cheers, shouts of joy, surprise and congratulation. But, above them all rose the peculiar yell of Trailer Tom, as, throwing out his long arms, he grasped Linwood and lifted him above the heads of those who a few moments before were ready to hang him for murder.

Searle stood in the midst, trembling from head to foot. The man's hardihood was all gone. His stony, staring gaze remained fixed on him whom he had supposed dead and buried. It was only diverted when rough hands seized him, and maledictions greeted his ears from all sides. But, this lasted only a moment. A profound silence ensued, for Archibald Ruggles began to speak.

"A few words will explain this mystery," he said. "On that fearful night when this wretch succeeded in pushing me off the bluff, I providentially struck the water in a spot where there were no stones underneath. I was stunned, however,

and must have remained unconscious for some time. When I began to realize any thing, I found myself holding on to a tree which had been uprooted by the previous rains. For miles, as it seemed, I was hurried along on the mad current. At times it required all my strength to retain my hold. As the stream widened, and the rain began to fall, I almost despaired of escape from death. My strength was nearly expended, when the tree was arrested for a moment by striking the bank where foliage touched the rising water. I remember clutching them desperately, and thus pulling my frail support closer up to the bank, on which I at length found myself. For some time I remained shivering under the forest-trees, completely exhausted. But, at last, I arose and staggered away in the rain and darkness. I hoped—though the hope was dim—to reach some habitation. Providence directed me, for I soon discovered before me a rude hut. It stood dangerously near to the rising water, but I entered. It was empty. Some negroes evidently had lived there, whom fears of the flood had driven away. There was yet fire on the rude hearth, and I soon had a cheerful blaze, before which I dried myself. I kept watch of the flood till after midnight. Then I lay down beside the fire and slept in security till morning. I arose, feeling better than I expected, though I was very weak and lame. When the sun came out I started on my return up the banks of the swollen stream. It was nearly dark when I came to black Sam's. No one had seen me. The poor negro and his wife were at first terribly frightened at my appearance. But, I soon convinced them I was not a ghost. I forbade them disclosing the secret of my being alive, and for two days was nursed beneath their roof. Meantime, I had learned from them the particulars of Linwood's arrest, sentence and escape. Until then I had believed that Linwood was my would-be murderer; but now I began to doubt.

"My plan of appearing in disguise was soon formed. The wife of black Sam procured me these old clothes, and having some knowledge of roots and herbs, I colored my face, and appeared suddenly in the place as a root-doctor. By accident, I discovered the body of poor Bates. Before arousing the settlers it occurred to me that, by giving the impression that his body was mine, I could the better watch Searle, whom I

began to suspect. With great difficulty I succeeded in placing portions of my own clothing upon the body on which hardly a fragment had remained. You know how well the ruse worked.

"I set to work to watch Searle. For a day or two I hardly dared to venture into my own house. I penetrated Frederick's disguise, even before he and this brave friend took me a willing prisoner. I would have disclosed myself sooner, but I felt a curiosity to see how the two would succeed in their task of impeaching Searle. I did not learn about my *presentment* till this day. But about the hidden garment—ah, Dorlon Searle, do you yet doubt the veracity of the root-doctor?"

The wretch could not speak, but gazed in a kind of stupor upon his interlocutor. Tom Hawk bent forward eagerly for the explanation.

"You little suspected that the 'root-doctor' followed you last night," continued Mr. Ruggles, turning his gaze upon the hunter. "I suspected all you did in regard to that knoll. When you returned ahead of Searle, I remained, discovered that of which I have spoken, and hid it in the barn this afternoon, as soon as I learned that the identity of Linwood was suspected. Searle must have watched me in secret, and stolen it when I left the barn."

"Knowed it!" exclaimed the Trailer, excitedly. "Ye got the start o' me, squire. 'Twas all witchery ter me, I allow, thet hidin' at the knoll. But—"

"Make the rascal speak—make him confess if 'near him,' cried many voices from the crowd.

"Don't ask 'im ter tell," remarked Tom. "I kin find the garnint; but *fother one!* Thet's what I want ter know!"

"One of the servants tells me that he saw Searle enter and leave the mansion about an hour before the arrest," said Carrie.

"It was *then* he took the coat from my chest," remarked Linwood.

"But the blood-marks?"

"Easy enuff to make *them* in a hurry," exclaimed Tom. "See hyar! Ye couldn't find the prints of the nigger's nails on his breast. *Them* hed time ter heal up. But if tha ain't another mark thet *ain't*—"

He ceased speaking, stepped suddenly forward, and stripped bare the left arm of Searle, who offered no resistance. The incision was discovered!

"Friends and neighbors, do nothing to-night," exclaimed Mr. Ruggles. "There will be time enough another day. He is a murderer at heart, but his wicked purposes have been providentially frustrated. He must not be hurried into the presence of his Maker with all this load of sin upon him. He must have time to repent."

Not a few among them would have proceeded at once to execute the wretch; but not one of them would disobey the wishes of the speaker. They fell back from Searle, but their maledictions were loud and deep. Between Mr. Ruggles, Linwood, Trailer Tom and Gates a hasty consultation was going on.

"It will do," said Mr. Ruggles. "He will be safe there till we decide—"

He was interrupted by a shriek from Carrie, as she called out to Linwood, and then there was a pistol-report, and a fall, and mingled shouts of alarm as dozens of men sprung madly forward, wild with excitement, over the spot where Searle had stood; for he had gone down, pierced through the brain by a bullet which he designed for another.

As soon as this became apparent, the tumult subsided. All stood for a moment feeling a peculiar awe. The silence was broken by the dying voice of Searle; but they could not catch his words. Before they were aware of it he was dead.

"God have mercy on his poor soul!" at length broke solemnly from the lips of Archibald Ruggles.

"How did it happen, Bill?" inquired Gates, after another pause.

"He meant ter kill Linwood," was the reply. "I ketched 'is arm an' bent it back in time. Only fur thet, he'd carried out what I'd begun ter notice in his eye a minit afore!"

They bore his body away in silence. It was late before the crowd dispersed, for they could hardly leave the side of the patron whom they loved. Gates grasped a hand each of Linwood and the Trailer.

"Fred, I've b'en pritty rough on ye through this 'ere, but I hope ye won't think that I meant ter—that I wa'n't actin'—?"

"Say no more about it, Gates. I impute no bad motives to you. We will be better friends than ever."

"Course ye will," echoed Tom. "Don't be foolish, Gates. Come up in the mornin', 'cos I'm gwine ter find the garnint. Now, youngster, thar' stands the gal an' her uncle waitin' for us."

Four persons sat up late that night in the Ruggles mansion—Mr Ruggles himself, the Trailer, Frederick Linwood and Carrie. The last two, however, tired out their older companions, remaining in the drawing-room long after they had retired to rest. The purport of their conversation may be easily guessed.

True to his word, the Trailer traced the steps of Searle, next morning, and found the fatal garment, where it had been pressed into the mud and water. He remained in the settlement an unusual length of time for him—three days—almost constantly in the company of Mr. Ruggles, who honored and treated him as a brother. But nothing could induce the brave, eccentric hunter to remain longer.

Abruptly shouldering his trusty rifle, he shook the hand of his host, and bade him adieu, without seeming to notice the other's emotion. He encountered Linwood and Carrie on the lawn.

"What?" said Linwood, "you are not going away?"

"Who sed I wa'n't?" he answered.

They both urged him, Carrie seizing his rough hand in her own.

"It's no use," he said. "I've done what I could hyar, an' may be wanted som'ar' else. Who knows? Good-by, youngster; and you, tew, gal. Thar, don't go ter cryin'. Oh, mighty, no! Whar's the use? See how 'tis. Be married some time. Wal, ye hav my best wishes, *in course!* Never mind. I shall call on ye ag'in, mebbe."

As he thus concluded, he moved off, that they might not witness the moisture that came into his eyes. Both his prediction and his promise in regard to Linwood and Carrie were fulfilled.

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